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ABSTRACT

This information packet contains 14 articles reprinted from various books and journals. Establishing and enriching school-community ties in small schools is the theme for this "Information Exchange Packet," the sixth in a series developed for Small Schools Network members. The articles and their authors are: "Skills in Building Support for Schools" (John R. Hoyle and others); "Education and Community Development: What Can the School Do?" (Adrian Bell and Alan Sigsworth); "Barriers to Greater Contact between Home and School" (Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.); "Forging Stronger Links Between Home and School" (Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.); "The School/Community Survey: A Useful Tool in Improving Education" (Terri V. Hunt and others); "Advertising Practices to Improve School-Community Relations" (Isobel L. Pfeiffer and Jane B. Dunlap); "Parents and Schools" (Far West Laboratory); "How Well Does Your District Support Single and Working Parents?" (from School Administrator); "Invite the Community to Learn Why You Do What You Do All Day" (Thomas Fowler-Finn); "Try Our One-Minute Messages: Score Points for Your Schools" (Raj Chopra); "Community Relations: Keeping School and Community as One" and "Community Relations: Keeping School and Community Together" (from Creative Ideas for Small Schools); "Notable Practices" (Steve Toy); and "A Model Plan" (Steve Toy). Each article contains information as to its original publication source. (ALL)

SMALL SCHOOLS NETWORK
INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Number 6

FALL 1988

ESTABLISHING and ENRICHING SCHOOL-COMMUNITY TIES in small schools

The Regional Laboratory
for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands

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"Community Relations: Keeping School and Community as One," and "Community Relations: Keeping School and Community Together," Creative Ideas For Small Schools, 1981.
Route to:_____ _____ _____

"Notable Practices," and "A Model Plan," School-Community Relations in Small Rural School Districts: Developing a Plan for a Productive Partnership, 1987.
Route to:_____ _____ _____

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MINI-BIBLIOGRAPHIES, COMPUCOPIES, AND COST AND NO-COST ITEMS

A listing of informational items included in the front section of Information Exchange Packet Number 6:

- Information and Membership Brochure, National Rural Education Association;
- ERIC-CRESS Bulletin, application for AEL mailing list, and a partial listing of publications;
- Information on and state facilitator list for the National Diffusion Network (sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Research and Improvement);

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- Information regarding the newly relocated ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools and a list of locations in the Northeast and Islands that house complete ERIC collections;

- An ERIC-CRESS mini-bibliography on Parent/Community Participation in Rural Schools;

- A list of various resources available from ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management (CEM) and The Oregon School Study Council, 1787 Agate Street, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403;

- A list of resources on school effectiveness available from Research for Better Schools (RBS), 444 North Third Street, Philadelphia, PA 19123-4107;

- Information on the programs of The Regional Laboratory; on the publication **The Cutting Edge**, a periodic compilation of new R & D Products available to members of the Lab; and an information request for the **Audio Lending Library.**

*** Additional copies of Information Exchange Packet Number 6 are available at a cost of $11.50 plus $2.50 postage and handling from The Regional Laboratory, 290 South Main Street, Andover, MA 01810, 508/470-0098. ***

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES OF VALUE

The list below includes other articles, reports, books, and resources omitted from this packet but nonetheless valuable sources of information for establishing and enriching school-community ties. Addresses and costs are included when available.

• • • Books/Reports • • •

Organizational Alternatives for Small Rural Schools: Final Report to the New York State Legislature. David H. Monk and Emil J. Haller, Department of Education, New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, December 1986. Cost: $5.00.

Drawing in the Family, Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, CO 80295. Cost: $12.00.

Worlds Apart: Relationships Between Families and Schools, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot. Basic Books, Inc., New York, NY, 1978.

Home and School as Partners: Helping Parents Help Their Children, Paul Haley and Karen Berry, The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands, 290 South Main Street, Andover, MA 01810. Cost $2.25 plus $2.50 postage and handling per order, please cite order #9505-05.

• • • Articles • • •

"Whom Should the Schools Serve? Some Dilemmas of Local Control in a Rural School District," Alan Peshkin, Curriculum Inquiry, 6, 3, 181-204, 1977. EJ160432/EA508565. *

"Some Effects of Involving Parents in the Curriculum," Anthony Wood, Trends in Education, 35, 39-45, October 1974. EJ110300/AA519788. *

"Organizing the School and Community for Cooperative Planning," James A. Beane, Community Education Journal, 3, 5, 26-28, 44 September 1973. EJ082636/EA504095. *

Additional Resources (continued)

"School and Community," Joseph H. McGivney and William Moynihan, Teachers College Record, 74, 2, 209-24, December 1972. EJ068994/AA54151. *

"Schools Where Parents Make a Difference," Don Davies, editor, Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, MA, 1976. ED133796/EA009011. *

"School-Community participation in Determining School Effectiveness," California State Department of Education, Sacramento, CA, Joint Committee on Educational Goals and Evaluation, 1976. ED128901/EA00862. *

"Building Confidence Through Communication," Anne Auten, Reading Teacher, V36N3, pp. 328-331. December 31, 1982. EJ271126/CS727379. *

"Promoting Public Trust Through Public Relations," Drew Cassidy and John Micklos, Jr., NASSP Bulletin, V66, N456, pp. 64-67, October 1982. EJ269849/EA515705. *

"Public Attitudes Toward Public Schools: Local versus National," NASSP Bulletin, pp. 115-121, December 1987.

"The Evidence Continues to Grow," (an annotated bibliography of resources on building school-community relationships), Anne Henderson, National Committee for Citizens in Education, Washington, DC. (no date or cost)

"Toward an Integrated Theory of School and Family Connections," Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218. (no date) Cost: $5.00.

"Schools and Families: Issues and Actions," Dorothy Rich, NEA Professional Library, P. O. Box 509, West Haven, CT 06516. (no date) Cost: $9.95.

Additional Resources (continued)

"Helping Parents Help Their Kids," The National School Public Relations Association, 1501 Lee Highway, Suite 201, Arlington, VA 22209. (no date or cost)

• • • Miscellaneous • • •

o From **IDEAS THAT WORK IN SMALL SCHOOLS**, a collection of one-page descriptions of effective practices in schools in New England and New York (22 to date), co-published by the Rural Schools Program, NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853 and The Northeast Regional Laboratory, 290 South Main Street, Andover, MA 01810. For copies please contact Small Schools Network, 83 Boston Post Road, Sudbury, MA 01776, 508/443-7991.

a. **York (ME) Ties its Architectural Heritage to American History;**

b. **Lebanon (NH) Helps Kids Prepare to Find Jobs;**

c. **Bartlett (NH) Has Community/School Partnership.**

o The Marlborough (MA) **Grandteacher Program**, an activity that brings retired teachers, working in cooperation with classroom teachers, back to the classroom to provide students with "mini-lessons" in their areas of expertise. For more information, please contact Larry McGowan, Coordinator, Grandteacher Program, Marlborough Public Schools, Marlborough, MA 01752.

* Refers to ERIC call letters for selected resources. Please see list of ERIC Collections near you included in the brochures section at the front of this packet (green flyer).

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Reprinted with permission from: Skills for Successful School Leaders, John R. Hoyle, Fenwick W. English, and Betty E. Steffy, American Association of School Administrators, 1985, pp. 41-62.

CHAPTER THREE

SKILLS IN BUILDING SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Building public support for schools is not something an effective school administrator does "on the side." It should, in fact, be the first act of survival.

Education is one of many institutions in our society that function as part of the political establishment, requiring support from the public at large. More than a generation ago, the economy and the birth rate were both booming, the mystique of the professional educator was enough to coax money from taxpayers to do whatever educators felt was necessary. Those days are gone forever.

Today's reality is that the public schools must stand in line with the other public institutions and plead for their share of tax revenue. Taxpayers have become more skeptical of the educational establishment and, whether directly or through elected officials, demand clear answers to such questions as (1) what are you going to do with the money? and (2) what did you do with the money we gave you last year?

The answers to those questions and the way the answers are communicated could spell the difference between an adequate and inadequate school budget. Many veteran school administrators who remember the days of plenty may resent having to justify the existence of programs offered by their schools or even their own existence. But this type of communications has become a fact of life. The art of building public support, therefore, has become the art of survival.

Today's school administrator no longer has the luxury of withdrawing from the political atmosphere that pervades every community with the classic apology, "My job is education." School administration today involves politics and requires effective communications, both internally and externally, and most successful school administrators have learned to master the necessary political skills.

The skills required by any person or institution to gain public support must include an understanding of political theory and the exercise of political skills, whether on a local, state, or national level. The methods used by successful politicians, who build a support base in the community, are not that different from those used by successful school administrators. They become informed, listen carefully, and respond appropriately to the needs of the community, the state, and the nation.

The competency of "building support for schools," essential for successful

school administrators, involves primarily mastery of the art of communication and includes the following skills:

a. Developing and implementing school/community and school/staff public relations, coalition building, and related public service activities.

b. Understanding and using politics of school governance and operations.

c. Understanding and using political strategies to pass bond, tax, and other referenda.

d. Developing lobbying, negotiating, collective bargaining, power, policy development, and policy maintenance skills to ensure successful educational programs.

e. Communicating and projecting an articulate position for education.

f. Understanding the role and function of mass media in shaping and forming opinions.

g. Understanding conflict mediation and developing the skills to accept and cope with inherent controversies.

"Public relations" was not listed first by chance. It is, in its broader sense, the one function that encompasses all the others. Whether they realize it or not, those skilled in "politics" must be skilled in "public relations" also.

What is "public relations"?

Public relations is practiced to some degree in virtually every school district in the country, although it may be called something else: school-community relations, public information, or communications. The reluctance of some administrators to accept it for what it is dates back to its earliest days, when public relations was identified with hucksterism and publicity-seeking. In some cases the reluctance results from a fear of communication or bias against being open.

Public relations, in fact, is not at all what P. T. Barnum was all about. Public relations is nothing more than what it says: relating with the public or publics, openly and honestly. Several decades ago, the American Association of School Administrators defined school public relations as a "cooperative development and maintenance of efficient two-way channels of information and understanding between the school, its personnel, and the community."[1]

About 20 years later, the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) substituted the word "educational" for "school" and embellished the definition a little further:

> Educational public relations is a planned and systematic two-way process of communication between an educational organization and its internal and external publics. Its program serves to stimulate a better understanding of the role, objectives, and accomplishments of the organization. Educational public relations is a management function that interprets public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual organization with the public interest and executes a program of action to encourage public involvement and to earn public understanding and acceptance.[2]

Nearly a decade later, the first full-fledged textbook in the field of school-community relations expanded even further on the definition of "public relations" in the educational arena and saw it as a "dynamic process" combining these ideas and practices:

1. A way of life expressed daily by staff members in their personal relations with colleagues, pupils, parents, and people in the community.

2. A planned and continuing series of activities for communicating with both internal and external publics concerning the purposes, needs, programs, and accomplishments of a school.

3. A planned and continuing series of activities for determining what citizens think of the schools and the aspirations they hold for the education of their children.

4. The active involvement of citizens in the decision-making process of a school so that essential improvements may be made in the educational program and adjustments brought to meet the climate of social change.[3]

Public relations involves more than what we say or do; it also involves how we say or do it. That point is made abundantly clear in *Public Relations for School Administrators* from the American Association of School Administrators.[4] That book delves into the framework and philosophy of school public relations, discusses the crucial role played by a public relations administrator, and points out the importance of effective public relations in building and maintaining public confidence. Personal communications skills involve nonverbal, listening, interpersonal, and group dynamics skills; dress; consensus building; and making effective presentations.

If communication isn't planned, it becomes haphazard or simply doesn't get done. Getting feedback from both staff and community through surveys, advisory groups, key communicators, and other means keeps a school system close to those it serves. Effective internal communication is a must, since public relations is effective only when it works from the inside out, and every employee must understand his or her important communications responsibilities. Also, if staff members don't know what the goals are and what their responsibilities are in meeting those goals, the school system will never reach them.

Involving and working with many segments of the community is essential. Those segments or publics include: nonparents, parents, members of the business community, older citizens, volunteers, pressure groups, community leaders, members of coalitions, government officials, the news media, and a host of others. Issues management and strategy development are also important parts of the

communications process. If issues aren't identified early and appropriate strategies developed, then they end up managing the school system instead of vice versa. Techniques such as producing effective publications and audiovisual materials, making use of the communications potential of computers, and marketing communication are also becoming basic parts of a reasonable public relations effort.

Creating a Public Relations Program

The key words in the NSPRA definition of educational public relations are "planned" and "continuing," meaning that public relations does not just happen. It is the result of a conscious effort by the school district, starting where all other school districts efforts begin — in a policy adopted by the board of education.

Just as there are school district policies establishing codes of conduct or standards for the selection of staff, there should be one avowing the board's commitment to a partnership with the community in the education of its children. The policy need not be detailed or complex. In fact, its strength should lie in the way it can be applied to virtually every aspect of the educational process.

In a book describing award-winning school public relations programs, the National School Public Relations Association suggested that an effective policy need be no more complex than this:

Resolved:

- That the Board of Education recognizes the responsibility of all members of the school staff, both professional and supporting, to keep lines of communication open with the public.
- That every effort shall be made to inform members of the community about the achievements and needs of the school district.
- That members of the community are welcome at all times to visit school buildings and to contribute whatever expertise they possess to the educational process, through volunteer work or service on advisory committees.
- That the school district will make every effort to determine the desires, needs, and attitudes of the community, through both formal and informal means, and will be responsive to the community's needs consistent with financial resources and constitutional responsibilities.
- That the school district is committed to cooperating at all times with the news media to help share the school story in the community.
- That all members of the staff shall be considered valued members of the school family, and shall be kept informed on a continuing basis of all news regarding school board and administrative decisions affecting the district.[5]

Steps in Developing a Public Relations Plan

In developing a public relations plan, school administrators may wish to involve staff and community in these steps:

- Identify those internal and external publics that need to understand or be involved if the schools are to be successful. Internal publics might include: teachers, school board members, custodians, and students. External publics might include parents, nonparent taxpayers, state legislators, the news media, and so on.
- Identify what each of these publics needs to understand for the schools to be successful. This step helps to sort out the content of your message for each.
- Identify communications channels or activities that can be used to communicate. Consider newsletters, the news media, advisory groups, coalitions, staff and community/surveys, open houses, and so on.
- Once communications activities are selected, determine the objectives to be accomplished. Then spell out who will do what by when. Obtain needed resources and get the program underway. Make frequent checks to be sure the approach is on the right track.

The School Public Relations Officer

A growing number of school systems have added a communications person to their top administrative team. This key person, sometimes designated as an assistant or associate superintendent or director, reports to the superintendent and is a member of the cabinet. To advise the school district on its communications, public relations officers must have access to all information and, like superintendents, are concerned with the entire school system. Among their responsibilities are: planning communications programs, providing counsel, developing publications and audiovisual programs, identifying and tracking issues, conducting surveys, developing strategy, working with the news media, providing communications training for staff, and so on.

The Art—and the Science—of Public Relations

Perhaps the most common mistake in public relations is to begin the process by communicating. Understanding the four-step process of public relations is what separates the skilled from the unskilled. Just as a successful politician does not give the same campaign speech to steelworkers and senior citizens, successful school administrators do not make a move without assessing the situation, the audience, and the issues.

The classic definition of public relations divides the process into four basic components:

1. Analyzing
2. Planning
3. Communicating
4. Evaluating

Analyzing

Commercial public relations and marketing firms never take a step without conducting some sort of research to determine how the public views their clients

and how they would react to a new product or service. Similarly, a school district will have greater impact on the attitude of its community if it knows what people are thinking and feeling up front.

While it would be simpler to base a public relations effort on truth as the school system sees it, in reality that truth means nothing if the community sees something else. Therefore, the first effort must be to determine the public's perceptions of the issues.

The most scientific way to do that is to conduct a survey of the community and staff to assess attitudes toward the schools and to determine the issues of greatest concern. In virtually all the Gallup polls of the last few years on attitudes toward public schools, the issue most concerning people has been "discipline." Therefore any public relations effort should, to the extent necessary, address that issue. In the same way, if taxpayers feel that high school graduates are entering the job market without basic skills, the schools must respond or risk losing the support of the community.

The analysis phase, however, can reveal more than public perceptions. It can give clues on how to address them. It is no accident that public confidence in education has declined in proportion to the number of adults who do not have children in schools. At the same time, Gallup polls show that adults who have had some direct contact with the schools — through students, community education programs, or open houses — tend to be more supportive. Therefore, it does not take much imagination to envision that public support could be increased by creating ways to bring citizens into direct contact with the schools.

While a formal survey may be the most authoritative way to come up with the information needed to undergird a public relations campaign, it is not the only way. Informal telephone polls can turn up interesting information, as can questionnaires in school newsletters, or meetings with representative members of the community. Depending on the available budget, time constraints, the information-gathering effort will be more or less scientifically reliable. A successful communications effort analyzes the situation and, based upon the analysis, moves into the planning stage.

Planning

In this stage, a school district considers its goals in context of its current situation and the public's perceptions and then charts the course of its communication program.

Exactly what is the desired outcome of the public relations effort? It can be ongoing and comprehensive, such as seeking to renew public confidence in the schools. Or it can be highly specific, such as trying to gain community approval of new school boundaries or a yes vote in a school bond referendum.

To whom is the campaign directed? There are many "publics" in a school's community: parents, staff, students, property owners, renters, nonparents, senior citizens, businesspeople, and so on. The same message doesn't necessarily have the same effect on each audience, so it must be tailored to fit each group's viewpoint—and perceptions.

What is the time frame? If the aim is to win an election in September, the campaign cannot begin in August. A timeline is a must, establishing what phase of the effort should take place when.

Finally, who is responsible for the various activities? Ideally, a districtwide public relations campaign involves more people than just the public information officer or the superintendent. Board members, principals, other administrators, and teachers can be given roles in the effort, as can secretaries, bus drivers, maintenance people, and even students. A diligent planning effort can assign roles to each of these members of the school team and come up with the information and materials they will need to do their jobs.

Once a school district has analyzed the situation and planned its program carefully, the actual communication may begin.

Communicating

The art of communication has many dimensions. It can be said that any message coming from the school is, for better or worse, a communication that can ultimately influence somebody's attitude. Unkempt grounds at a neighborhood elementary school can have as devastating an impact on public confidence as news reports of a drug bust at the high school. No communication has zero impact. It's up to a school district to plan communications that provide an accurate reflection of the schools.

The most rudimentary of public relations efforts rely exclusively on press releases and occasional school district publications. These are, of course, necessary components of any communication effort, but they are far too limited in their impact to carry the entire burden. Even with the most supportive of local media, the public rarely receives the message as the school designed it. In many cases, it is modified to fit the journalistic requirements of the media. Even if reported verbatim, in few cases does the message actually reach all of the desired audience.

Likewise, school newsletters, brochures, or annual reports can have only limited impact on citizens' attitudes. For one thing, it is difficult to produce a written document with universal appeal to all segments of the community. Moreover, sociological research shows that the written word is rarely persuasive at all except to a tiny elite segment of a community. Written documents do, however, reinforce seeds planted by other means.

Face-to-face communications are still the most effective of all "other means." While it may not be possible for school administrators to attempt, like some political candidates, to knock on every door and shake every hand, there are other ways to reach the public on a person-to-person level with the school message. Any personal contact between a member of the public and the school is a communication, and contacts that are orchestrated as part of the planned public relations effort should have a significant impact on the target audience.

Involving community members in school activities as volunteers is an example of a face-to-face communications effort. The same can be said of open houses at school or education fairs at the shopping mall, coffee klatches in the homes of influential citizens, neighborhood advisory councils, or Grandparents' Day at the local elementary school. Bringing adults into the schools at night to learn rug

hooking or aerobics or new work skills enables them to see examples of student work on the walls and gives them a feeling of belonging to the school family too.

The communication methods available at an given time are limited only by an administrator's imagination and stamina. There are service clubs that need luncheon speakers and PTAs that need evening programs. There are community influentials who need cultivating, and senior citizens who long to be part of the mainstream again. Each of these contacts can be as valuable in building public support as a dozen annual reports.

They can be, of course, but how do we know if they are? That is where the evaluation phase comes in.

Evaluating

Just as teachers do not assume students have learned the lessons without testing, schools cannot assume that their message has gotten through or had the desired impact on the target audience without checking. And while determining that impact is more difficult than springing a classroom quiz, it is no less important.

Evaluation might come in the form of a decisive defeat at the polls, but there are less traumatic ways of finding out whether a campaign is working. Evaluations could be conducted periodically throughout the school year. Politicians, of course, are famous for polling voters almost constantly during a campaign. There is a very good reason for that. If the campaign is not going exactly according to plan, they want to find out while there is still time to do something about it.

While weekly public opinion polls may be more than an average school system can afford, there are less costly ways to make periodic evaluations. The effectiveness of a presentation, for example, can be determined by handing out an evaluation form to the audience. A brief questionnaire included in a newsletter can provide feedback on a program's effectiveness. Spot telephone surveys and questionnaires sent to selected mailing lists can reveal what kind of impact an effort is having, as can strategy meetings with "key communicators," attuned to the prevailing mood in their neighborhoods.

Even if the results are not as scientifically reliable as a full-blown community survey, they will tell *something* about the way a program campaign is progressing.

It is evident that the evaluation phase of one campaign can be the analysis phase of the next. This, however, is merely indicative of the pervasive nature of public relations. Everything a school district does can be considered part of its public relations program, and everything it does can have an impact on its level of community support. Whether that public relations campaign has the desired result depends on whether it is just allowed to happen, or whether its planning is based on careful analysis and carried out skillfully with frequent evaluations.

A Few Words About Publics

Skilled communicators understand that there is not one "public." In fact, there are many internal and external publics, some with common factors, some very different. In many cases, a message sent to the "community" can have an equal

impact on parents and nonparents alike, but others can fall on deaf ears or even provoke a negative reaction if they are directed to the wrong audience.

An obvious example of this might be an information campaign directed to senior citizens. While one might assume that older people listen to the radio a great deal, public service announcements do no good if the only radio stations carrying the announcements are those specializing in rock music.

Part of the planning effort, therefore, is identifying the specific public to be targeted using a specific method and determining how to get that message to hit home. The more focused a message is, the more effective it can be. Conversely, the more universal a message is, the less impact it will have on any one recipient. Time and money determine how narrow a targeting process is possible, but unless the concept is understood, a message could easily have no impact at all.

It's easy to see how certain messages can appeal to one group while angering another. For example, as noted above, external publics include parents—who have a lot at stake in the school system; and nonparents—those whose direct stakes have grown up; and other nonparents—whose direct stakes are either unborn or too young. There are taxpayers, who can be either parents or nonparents, and older citizens, who can be two out of the three but must be considered unique because of other considerations. There are businesspeople who are targeted because of their professional rather than personal status, just as public officials comprise one audience at home and another at work.

Internal Communication

While any discussion of communication generally turns to external publics, internal communication often creates the greatest problems and suffers the greatest neglect.

A school system should organize an effective *internal* communications program because:

- The schools will never reach their goals unless staff members understand what the goals are and their roles in helping reach them.
- Staff members feel a greater sense of ownership when they are involved.
- School staff members have knowledge and skills that can be tapped to make the school system more effective. Working as a team can lead to a sense of synergy, and the staff becomes greater than just the sum of its individual parts.
- The right hand must know what the left hand is doing.

Concerns about morale, increasing levels of stress, and worry about staff burnout have brought greater attention to the key issue of internal communications. To quote one administrator, "You can tell the community how great the math program is, but if staff members don't know about it or feel any ownership for it, they'll kill you. When asked about that math program, they can be expected to say they don't know anything about it, unless they are well informed."

Staff surveys that receive the attention of management, staff advisory commit-

tees, and newsletters are just a few of the methods school systems use to communicate with staff members.

Internal communication must include building a team relationship with fellow administrators and working effectively with the board of education. Woven together by effective communication, all will feel more a part of the educational team.

Considering that face-to-face communication is most influential, the broad range of personal contacts made by the many staff members can have a market impact on a school's image. To the general public, every school employee is considered authoritative. Whether the neighbor is a principal or a groundskeeper, what he or she says about the educational system carries a lot of weight.

It makes sense, therefore, for school administrators to consider every member of the staff as important members of the public relations team. They should be kept informed of all the major issues facing the schools—not just those in their specific area of responsibility—and should be made to feel they are a valued part of the school family.

The importance of cultivating that family feeling cannot be overstated, and its impact can be greater than as just a public relations tool. A survey of school principals in 1983 concluded, "Open, honest two-way communication is the bulwark of high morale and is a key to a motivated staff ... A sense of community results from the sharing of common information, common feelings, and common goals. That sense of community can exist within a staff when all feel informed ... when they feel involved ... and when they feel their ideas are heard."[6]

The Role of the Mass Media

It used to be the "press." Today it's the "media." Despite a growing emphasis on electronics, it's the same institution.

The relationship between the schools and the media is important. Schools need the media to help get their messages out to the community. The media, however, are fiercely independent and will reject any implication that they can be "used" by a governmental body. The media operate under a code that emphasizes their freedom from governmental control, a code that puzzles many educators and provokes a question heard ad infinitum at board tables for over a century: "Why can't we ever get any *good* news in the paper?"

There is the temptation, to which many school administrators have succumbed, to approach the local media as adversaries, responding to questions reluctantly and suspiciously. That cynicism, however, merely exacerbates the situation. It is best to avoid a breakdown in communications between the school and the media. One old adage states: Never argue with anyone who buys ink by the barrel and paper by the ton.

It is critical for school administrators to understand the role of the media in this country. Many great Americans have risen to the defense of the free press since our nation was formed, but chances are that whenever a journalist is challenged, this famous statement by Thomas Jefferson will be offered in response:

> The way to prevent these irregular interpositions of the people is to give them full information of their affairs through the channels of the public papers, and to contrive that these papers penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.[7]

The story goes on, of course, that later in his public life Jefferson became disenchanted with the press, as did many subsequent presidents. But nobody has been able to tamper successfully with the freedoms granted by the First Amendment. It stands to reason that the pique of a local school superintendent is not going to make much of a dent either.

Arguing about whether the media "deserve" First Amendment protection or blaming the media for school problems simply because they reported on them can be a ticket to disaster. Problems should be explored and solved, not blamed on others. Also, the community has a right to know. If schools are doing something that can't be fully reported, perhaps they shouldn't be doing it in th first place.

The Meaning of News

There has never been a definitive answer to the question, "What is news?" Charles A. Dana, when editor of the *New York Sun*, declared that news was something that made someone exclaim. He later improved on that notion by defining news as "anything which interests a large part of the community and has never been brought to their attention." Gerald W. Johnson, after his years with the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, gave his definition a shading that emphasized a journalist's pride as well as independence: "News is such an account of such events as a first-rate newspaperman, acting as such, finds satisfaction in writing and publishing."

It is not facetious, therefore, to respond to the question by saying, "News is what's in the newspaper" or "News is what you see on TV." In other words, as one of the basic texts of college journalism puts it, "News is not an event, however stupendous, but the report of that event; not the actual happening but the story or account of that happening which reaches us."[8]

The first thing to understand, therefore, is that news is the creation of the newsperson, not the news source. If a reporter does not see an event as "newsworthy," it becomes a nonevent. If a reporter sees something else as "newsworthy"—something that nobody else might even have noticed—it suddenly becomes "news." School administrators who deal successfully with the media have learned how to spot or create events that are newsworthy and to anticipate the reaction of a reporter to any happening or situation.

Therefore, educators skilled in dealing with the media will not rail at local reporters for being too "negative" or for "looking only for the sensational." And they won't accuse them of "only wanting to sell papers," which is about as foolish as accusing a local auto dealer of "only wanting to sell cars." Instead, they will

understand that the nature of news requires reporters to look for the unusual, the new, the different. Much of what schools wish to communicate is interesting and newsworthy, but it is often not unusual enough to warrant a news item. Therefore, schools need to remember their other channels of communication: newsletters, advisory groups, and so on.

It's unfortunate but true that people doing what they are supposed to do is simply not news. When teachers are teaching and kids are sitting quietly in their seats learning, it is not news. But when a student pulls a knife and holds that teacher hostage, that's big news. The media can be expected to converge on the school in droves, and there's a chance that an administrator unschooled in the ways of the press will demand to know, "Where were you yesterday when everything was so peaceful and quiet around here?"

Events entirely out of the ordinary are newsworthy, and no amount of protestation will deter the media. The best thing to do in the event of some kind of disaster, then, is to help the reporter obtain accurate information and avoid reporting rumors. The facts are never as damaging as misinformation or misunderstanding.

A public relations policy adopted by the board of education should require the school system to cooperate with the press. There are few if any occasions in which an administrator is justified in "stonewalling" or keeping information from the media. The point to be remembered is that reporters will get a story with or without the school spokeperson's help. It is to a school system's advantage to see that information reporters get is correct. The law covers questions of student privacy, and the news media would seldom insist that school administrators break the law.

If it sounds as if it's up to the school administrator to accommodate the media and make a special effort to work with them, that is correct. The public school system is part of the government and as such is fair game to the press. The news media are generally privately owned and protected by the Constitution. They do not have to answer to anybody but the people they serve. As television anchorman Walter Cronkite once observed:

> Our job is only to hold up the mirror — to tell and show the public what has happened, and then it is the job of the people to decide whether they have faith in their leaders or government. We are faithful to our profession in telling the truth. That's the only faith to which journalists need adhere.[9]

Dealing with the Media

Understanding the media's role in a free society, school administrators should be able to enjoy mutually satisfactory relationships with local reporters and editors. Here are some guidelines to keep that relationship flourishing:

- *Be honest and open.* An educator who appears to be hiding something is asking for further investigation. Board policy should include a procedure for dealing with press inquiries, including who speaks for the schools when the superintendent is not available. The policy should also reflect the school system's intent to be open and honest. Never say "no comment" or refuse to answer a legitimate question. A good reporter will keep digging and find the answer elsewhere — and it may not be in the form the school district would like to see it.

- *Be timely.* Understand the media's deadlines. If a television reporter wants to do a story for the 6 p.m. news, you can't put off the interview until after 5 p.m. Nothing angers a reporter more than a news source who returns a call after deadline. A shrewd administrator knows the deadlines of reporters and instructs other staff members and secretaries what to do about messages. Respecting deadlines is one of the easier ways to build good will between school and the media.

- *Be flexible.* By its very nature news is relative. A big story one day may not find space in the paper the next. That means a reporter will not always wait until you'r ready to "release" a story. In some cases you have to be ready to answer the questions when they're asked.

- *Avoid jargon.* "Criterion-referenced testing" means as much to a reporter as "dingbat" or "segway" means to an educator. Speak plain English so that there will be no misunderstanding about what you are saying. Jargon often comes across as an indication of the speaker's exalted ego, which does not help promote a good relationship. If you have to use educational terms, be sure to explain them.

- *Don't be defensive.* Help the reporter with the story but don't suggest how it should be written. Never ask to see a story before it's run. Respect the reporter's job, but don't stand in awe of him or her.

- *Avoid speaking off the record.* There are, no doubt, occasions when speaking "off the record" will be advantageous to both parties. A complex issue like the annual budget could be discussed in an off the record briefing before it is released so that the reporter will understand it better. For this to work, however, there must be an atmosphere of mutual trust as well as an understanding of what "off the record" means. It is not a phase to be tossed off lightly. It should not be used as a weapon to prevent a reporter from using something he or she has already learned, because the reporter is under no legal or ethical obligation to honor it. Nothing is ever really "off the record" because reporters can usually obtain the information from other sources.

- *Be available.* The media really appreciates a news source who is available when needed, and an appreciated news source usually gets "good press" instead of carping and criticism. But this means being available during non-working hours or even when the story is one the administrator would rather not see in print. Conceding that there are problems and facing them squarely helps an administrator's credibility not only with the media but with the public. Ignoring problems develops a "Superintendent in Wonderland" atmosphere that could seriously damage the school system in the long run. Also, when schools are presented as perfect, convincing the community that funds are needed becomes more difficult.

● ***Don't overreact.*** Even the most cooperative public officials are burned once in a while by the media, but if they are smart they control their tempers. Angry phone calls or nasty letters to the editor only fuel the flames. A reasoned response to an inaccurate story or unfair criticism usually gets some space or air time, but it's unreasonable to demand equal space or equal time. In the final analysis, is it really worth destroying a good working relationship? Although at the time it might seem devastating, what will its long-term impact be after all? How many people really saw it? How many really care? And how many people will really let it change their attitudes about the schools? No less a media expert than William L. Rivers noted that public opinion is slow to change, regardless of the nature of new information: "Fragments of new facts and new ideas merge with long-held opinion and long-retained information. The changes that emerge are usually glacial." To share alternative information or points of view, use other means of communication.[10] Chances are good the incident will be forgotten quickly.

In summary, although the media and the public schools are often perceived as natural adversaries, this does not mean they must be antagonists. Each institution has its role in society, and each can help the other perform better. Wise educators know that cooperating with the local media can a give school system reliable conduits of information to its publics. Astute journalists know that education is a good source of news because people in the community want to know what is going on in their schools. It is self-destructive for members of either profession to provoke a feud that deprives schools of their channel of communication and the media of their sources of information.

However, in a head-to-head battle between the educational establishment and the mass media, the media have the advantage. Rooted in the Bill of Rights to the Constitution, it is the same advantage that educators would enthusiastically applaud if the media were on the trail of dishonest councilmembers or crooked judges.

Therefore, school administrators, as agents of the public, have a duty to respect the rights and privileges of the media and to cooperate to the fullest extent possible so that the school story will be told.

But it is also the duty of a school administrator to understand that the media are not the *only* conduits of public information and attitudes and that a school district relying solely on the press can expect limited support in the community. The media must be considered as one of many means of sending a school's message into the community, and the school administrator that keeps this in perspective will have greater success and fewer ulcers.

Education and the Art of Politics

Historically, school administrators have been successful in insulating school operations from local partisan politics. In most locales, even where school leadership and educational issues must be decided at the polls, the law forbids involvement of political parties per se. There is, however, a great deal more to politics than Democrats battling Republicans. While educators, because of their conscience

as much as the law, usually avoid the political trenches, they are beginning to realize that political decisions affect their futures and the quality of education.

The politicizing of education began in earnest in the 1970s, when communities throughout the country reacted to shrinking tax dollars by re-evaluating the priorities of the services they support. It shocked many school administrators that education did not automatically get a lion's share. Enrollment was declining while the percentage of people without school-age children was rising. Taxpayers, feeling the pinch of inflation, began to question whether schools were doing the job they were supposed to do. Pressure groups were on the rise. Public confidence in schools declined. Federal and state bureaucrats heaped mandates on the schools without providing money to fund them.

While many individual districts felt the pinch as their local bond or millage elections failed year after year, the issue did not gain national attention until Proposition 13, a tax limitation measure, passed in California. Other states, most notably Massachusetts, followed with similar initiatives soon after. There should no longer have been any doubt in the educational establishment that survival from now on was going to require involvement in the political process.

Again, this is not to say that school people had to run for office or actively work for or against political candidates. But school people needed to realize that issues surrounding financing of public education had to be part of every political campaign. Potentially devastating decisions were being made by political bodies at both local and state levels, while voters who had the opportunity to approve or reject proposed school budgets were becoming more and more negative. The future of public education as we know it was at risk.

While in many parts of the country the focus turned to state capitals for the fiscal transfusion necessary to revive public education, it became evident that the educational establishment often had little or no clout there, either. A study of educational governance in the mid 1970s concluded:

> The various educational organizations are so divided in some states that areas of common interest are not even sought, much less found. Educators and politicians often talk past each other, a condition that has contributed to widespread mistrust of motive and performance on both sides. And state administrators in the different agencies, this probably being nowhere more true than in education, operate in a semiautonomous fashion as if the social problems of a state had little or no relation to one another.[11]

School administrators who insisted on keeping their heads in the political sand were courting disaster. Public education needed somebody to carry its banner in virtually every political arena. Sometimes it was a legislator personally dedicated to education. Sometimes it was a school board member whose familiarity with the political processes opened a few doors. And sometimes it had to be the superintendent or another administrator.

The 1980s, therefore, saw the end of the ivory tower. It had been blown to bits by taxpayer revolts and demands for "accountability." Its former occupants

either retired with some bitterness or stepped out into the sunshine and joined the fray. They had become "politicans"—not to seek personal gain or glory, but to place education atop the public's agenda once again. And as the fiscal crisis eased, they began to succeed. Their success was generally tied to their ability to communicate effectively in a personal manner or in a more complex manner such as through coalitions.

Coalition Building

Success in politics often comes from the ability to bring diverse groups together under a common banner. The same can now be said of education, where the art of building coalitions is vital to building a base of support in the community. This was recognized by educational researchers as early as the middle 1960s:

> The problem appears to be one of searching out the responsible publics, the people and the groups in society, broadly conceived, who are most capable of charting the course for the public schools, and then creating the means for converting their expressions into public decisions.[12]

Local educators realize that their relationships with local groups are essential to survival. In many areas, local school system authority is being eroded by state and federal initiatives, state and national teacher unions, and the growth of government through centralization.[13] This means that educators must reach out for help at the local level to gather the clout to have an impact in Washington or in the state capital.

Coalition building reaches into a community to construct networks of influence and support at the local level for school programs. It may also mean creating networks among other educational groups. It would be naive, however, to say that this support comes without a price. While it may not dilute the decision-making power of the school administration, at the very least it opens school affairs to increased citizen participation and possible meddling and the potential of power conflicts between school authorities and the community. As a forum of educational leaders was warned in the late 1970s:

> Why then should school people want to be responsive to what they consider virtually insatiable, potentially less-informed, and legally non-accountable communities? The big carrot in eliciting responsiveness from school people is the support of their clientele. That support is no longer freely given. It is exchanged for something.[14]

It is here where a school administrator's political skills—the arts of compromise and communication, if you will—must come to the fore. Community groups cannot be expected to go out on a limb for public schools without being assured of getting something in return. That "something," of course, does not have to be a distasteful concession, but it might represent a new direction in governance, curriculum, or training that would not have been considered back in the days of the ivory tower.

The year 1983 became known in educational circles as "The Year of the Reports," as nearly 30 studies of national significance dissected public education and put the public schools on the nation's front pages. One of the most common threads running through these reports was the need for the schools to reach out into the community to use available resources beyond those funds granted to them by taxpayers. This statement, although devoted primarily to perceived failings in mathematics and science education, was typical:

> ...the Commission strongly recommends that local school boards foster partnerships between the school board, school administrators, local officials, business and industry, labor leaders, and parents in order to facilitate constructive change. They should encourage business and other institutions not primarily involved in education to become active participants and lend fiscal, political, and other support to the local education system. They should help to further plans for improving educational offerings that stress mathematics, science and technology, rigorous curricula, and high standards of student and teacher commitment and performance. They should encourage parental involvement in all these efforts.[15]

The consummate politician who might be able to elicit support without promising a *quid pro quo* is rare. If the public perceives a life-or-death situation, perhaps they would be drawn to a cause as the only solution. But public education has lost the mystique that once guaranteed support without question. The studies of 1983, right or wrong, seemed to confirm what many people had suggested all along -- that public schools needed help and support. The result is that public schools must now enter into dialogues with the various community power structures and bargain for their support.

One of the most effective partners for the public schools is becoming the business community, but even here it does not occur out of altruism. The private sector is supporting public schools in communities all over the country with money, expertise, and outright staff assignments, because it sees how important a strong educational system is to the future viability of the local business community. Thus the appeal for business-school partnerships typically includes this *quid quo pro*:

> The partnership your business establishes with the schools is an investment. And it's an investment that will provide you with great returns—a better work force, an improved tax base for your community, a healthier national economy, a strong national defense, and an increased competitive edge in international competition. Consider this: Not only are future employees for your business in school today; so are future markets for your products and services.[16]

It makes good sense for school districts to offer specialized vocational training coinciding with the skills needed by a local industry. It is, in fact, a common-sense compromise to gain that industry's support for education in general. The art of coalition building, therefore, is the art of being responsive to the needs of those interests that adopt your cause. If that sounds like pure politics, so be it, because it is pure survival.

Guidelines for Successful Coalitions

Here ore o few guidelines for o successful coolition:

- Select members who will work in the common good, not just in their own self-interest.
- Be sure members hove the informotion they need to moke wise decisons.
- Encouroge members to develop st, ategies for deoling with issues.
- Be positive ond look to the future. Don't let the meetings become gripe sessions or excuses to defend the post.
- Keep coolition members, your stoff, boord, ond community informed through o communicotions network.
- Avoid voting. Work on the bosis of consensus If there is o disogreement, modify the pronouncement, if possible.
- Don't insist thot oll groups deol with the objectives in the some monner. They moy hove divergent constituencies. Most con ogree, however, on communitywide themes, public service onnouncements, reseorch projects, ond community celebrotions.
- Be willing to compromise for the common good. Seek or develop common denominotors. Be o good negotiotor ond ovoid imposing your point of view on others.
- Shore the glory. If the coolition is successful, give it some credit.

Identifying Community Power Structures

School administrators who reach into the community for support should do so with an understanding of where the power and the influence really lie. It is a rare community indeed where the real influentials also hold the authority of elective office. In most cases, the actual powe. tructure is hidden from public view, but it is no less real when the decisions ' count are made in the local bank or in a local coffee shop instead of in City Hall.

Of the several methods for identifying community power structures, the most nous was developed by E. Hunter in 1953. This method, called the "reputational technique," has been adapted by public relations practitioners to set up neighborhood networks of "key communicators." Hunters's approach requires four steps:

1. Influentials who appear to be at the center of community activities are asked to provide names of those in other spheres of the community who are powerful.
2. A panel of knowledgeable community people is asked to narrow the list to the most influential.
3. In-depth interviews are conducted with the most influential persons, dealing with formal and informal ties with other leaders.
4. A picture of the power structure is pieced together from all of the data gathered.[17]

The process of identifying community power structures need not be as formal, but neither can it be overlooked. Without a clear understanding of where the real influence resides, a school administrator could be guilty of spinning wheels when he or she could be making hay.

Public relations campaigns often start by establishing "key communicator" networks based on admittedly unscientific, but sufficiently reliable, information about informal community opinion leaders. This information can be gathered by staff members or volunteers who go into the various neighborhoods and ask citizens at random," Whose opinions do you respect?" In most cases, there is surprising consensus. Community influentials can be a cosmetologist or a bartender, a banker or realtor, a homemaker active in civic affairs, or a teacher.

Those people whose names appear most frequently in the responses are wooed to join an elite group of education supporters who are then asked to relay information about the schools to the citizens in their community. Just as important, they are also asked to serve as a source of feedback from the community to the school administration.

This has been a relatively simple and effective technique of targeting messages from the schools to where they will do the most good. Whether the "key communicators" found this way in local neighborhoods actually represent the "community power structure" sought by sociologists is a matter for debate. Nevertheless, it makes good sense to communicate directly with the grass roots than to waste time and money cultivating people with apparent status but little influence outside a very small and select circle.

Winning at the Polls

At no time are political skills more obvious—and necessary—than when a school district must ask the voters for money. Even though financing of public education is becoming more a function of state legislatures, the ability to get such a referendum passed is still a test of administrative leadership.

We have already discussed the need to understand community power structures. School administrators who bypass those structures, either through ignorance or error, often pay heavily for their mistakes. The development of political strategies

to pass bond, tax, and other referenda has at its core accurate information about any power structures operating within the school district.

There is nothing outrageous about schools' developing political strategies consistent with community power structures. It would, in fact, be dereliction of duty if the school administration did not do everything in its power—within the legal restrictions governing political campaigns—to obtain adequate funding for its educational programs.

Those school administrators who work in districts where funding comes directly from another political body, rather than directly from the voters, are spared one form of political pressure. They would hardly agree, however, that persuading the city council or county supervisors to raise the tax rate is a simple matter. Very often, knowledgeable public officials are more difficult to convince than the average voter, especially when they are the product of an invisible power structure of their own.

Nevertheless, going before the voters is the ultimate political act and it calls for the ultimate in political acumen and public relations skills. In the 1970s, when tax revenues began to shrink dramatically, many school districts were surprised to find their routine funding requests defeated soundly at the polls. It was bad enough that money for education was denied. It was just as bad that school authorities were surprised that it happened.

That decade was one of political education for school administrators. Many of them had taken the electorate for granted for too long. After all, they reasoned, we are educating their children and they should be willing to pay. What they failed to notice is that most of the electorate no longer had children in the schools. They had not kept their fingers on the pulse of the community.

It was a rude awakening for many school superintendents. Some threatened to close the schools if the next referendum didn't pass, but the public voted no anyway. It was not until some schools actually were closed (whether by necessity or to make the point) that the voting public realized how critical the situation really was.

It became obvious in the 1970s that, to survive, school administrators had to become politically astute. Many, of course, declined the challenge and retired from careers that had spanned decades. But the young firebrands who took their place were a breed apart—educators who mingled with the community power structures, learned to play the political game, and began to win.

Nowhere was their success more evident than in the growing approval rate of local referenda. By understanding the local political structure, these school administrators were able to gather support where it counted. And by applying the best techniques of public relations to their finance campaigns — including, when necessary, the building of coalitions—they were able to persuade voters that a vote for public education was a vote for their community in general.

Tips for Winning at the Polls

Since laws governing finance campaigns vary so widely from state to state, these suggestions can be taken only as generalizations that may be adapted to specific situations. They represent the best thinking of political and public relations experts in this critical area.

Many of these suggestions are adapted from an extensive kit prepared by the National School Public Relations Association titled, "You Can Win at the Polls," which surveyed 50 successful bond issues and operating fund elections and came up with ten characteristics that winning campaigns have in common. To improve your school's chances of winning at the polls, you should:

- *Develop a strong year-round public relations program.* People's attitudes are developed throughout the year. A last-minute campaign blitz is not going to change their minds. Keeping the voters informed about the good things in the schools, and especially the needs, will make them more receptive when election details are announced. It stands to reason that a school district will not succeed if it ignores the taxpayers 11 months of the year and then asks for their money in the twelfth.

- *Study and analyze long in advance.* This critical part of a campaign can begin almost a year ahead of time. It should involve advisory committees and citizens groups so that the public has a chance to contribute its priorities. Without early community support, the eventual campaign could be doomed easily.

- *Study district historical data.* By examining the voting results of past elections precinct by precinct, a district can figure out what worked and what didn't, and who helped and who didn't. This way, campaign planners can assign precinct quotas and identify areas that need special attention.

- *Survey the community.* The same kind of poll vital to any kind of public relations program can tell a school district exactly what the public's attitude might be toward money appeal. Never base your campaign on the narrow frame of reference of individual staff members. By plugging in some hypothetical tax questions, planners will be able to project potential "yes" voters and know who to go after when the campaign actually begins.

- *Develop campaign strategy.* Start drawing up the timeline for the announcement as well as the campaign itself. Appoint election coordinators representing the diversity of the district, along with a manageable-sized steering committee (10 to 15 members at most). Know who will be responsible for providing a continuous stream of information to campaign workers, voters, and the media.

- *Conduct a special voter registration.* If the law permits a special registration day, go after those voters who are most likely to support school elections, like parents of young children and new voters. These registrants then become an ideal audience for future informational activities and get-out-the-vote efforts on election day.

- *Develop the materials, tools, and techniques.* Fact sheets, brochures, and sample ballots help people understand the issues. But mass communications materials rarely change attitudes. Face-to-face communicating changes attitudes: coffees, open houses, meetings with neighborhood influentials, and the support of opinion leaders in the community.

- *Identify your "yes" voters and go after them.* The study of historical data early in the campaign should have revealed what precincts are most likely to produce favorable votes; so it's time to come up with techniques to reach those voters and get them to the polls. At this point, ignore the negative voters because such people are rarely reached by short-term efforts.

- *Get out the vote on election day.* The campaign plan should have been designed to peak on election day, when a combination of efforts focus on getting "yes" voters to the polls. This could mean arranging babysitting and transportation. And, experts insist, keep the campaign team working right up to the last minute. It develops an esprit de corps that even in defeat will serve the district well the next time around.

- *Evaluate the results carefully and promptly.* The final step in every public relations campaign is evaluation. This debriefing should be held immediately after an election, win or lose, while everything is fresh in people's minds. Not only does this reveal strengths and weaknesses of the campaign, it also identifies people who should be thanked for their help so they will be willing to help again.

School administrators who orchestrate winning referendum campaigns have, to all intents and purposes, made a successful entry into the world of politics. The strategies and techniques used to identify favorable voters and get them to the polls are not unlike those used by politicians in running for office. There remains, however, yet another challenge for school administrators that will thoroughly test all they have learned so far in the political arena.

Reprinted with permission from: The Small Rural Primary School: A Matter of Quality, by Adrian Bell and Allan Sigsworth, Falmer Press, 1987, pp. 250-277.

Chapter 10

Education and Community Development: What Can the School Do?

This book began with an account of two struggles, each one concerned with a local authority's proposal to close a small rural school and with the organized opposition that was aroused to defeat that plan. The imminent prospect of hanging, it is said, concentrates a man's mind wonderfully. Something similar might also be said about the impending closure of a school; it compels protagonists and antagonists alike to articulate, more lucidly than previously, their beliefs about education.[1] In the cases we considered, despite their differing outcomes, it was possible to discern two quite distinct sets of beliefs about primary education and how best it might be provided in rural areas. We referred to them as the 'official' and the 'grass-roots' perspectives.

According to the official view, small rural schools were an educational liability and an expensive one at that. The educational problems focused on their inability to provide an adequately broad curriculum because of their small and isolated staffs. Furthermore, the limited peer groups invariably found in these schools offered little competition and little social or academic stimulus to pupils. A dispersed pattern of provision was presented therefore as being inherently likely to offer an inferior educational experience to the pupils it was supposed to serve as well as being economically inefficient; the solution, ideally, was rationalization, or as the Americans more bluntly put it, consolidation.

The grass-roots perspective saw matters differently in every respect. The individualized attention to pupils that small rural schools were able to provide and the personal qualities of the teachers were valued more highly than whatever superior facilities larger schools might enjoy and the range of subject expertise that could be found in a larger staff. An atmosphere which fostered cooperative rather than competitive behaviour was seen, and welcomed, as a distinguishing feature of these schools. Far from giving pupils an inferior education, they were depicted as offering an education which dovetailed with the small-scale characteristics of rural communities. And if they entailed higher unit costs, they were the one tangible asset that rural inhabitants received for the rates they paid.

We went on to argue that from the time of Hadow, the small rural school had been officially defined as a cause for educational concern. The exact nature of the deficiency had varied according to the educational issues, priorities or fashions that were prevalent at any one time, but always the particular characteristics of these schools had been depicted as rendering them educationally pathological. Judged by criteria that were derived from the experience of providing primary education in concentrated urban areas, they were deficient, but stemming from the many cases of individual closure, a nationally organized counter-ideology developed which rejected the urbanized assumptions built into the official ideology. It asserted that the scale and organization of primary education found in urban areas was not a universal ideal that should be transposed into the very different social context of sparsely populated areas.

In the middle sections of this book we have examined the assertions and counter-assertions which are embraced by these two ideological positions and which we summarized at the end of chapter 1. It is a task that has been made difficult by the comparative paucity of empirical data which surround these issues; in a predominantly urban society, education in rural areas has been a marginal activity for educational researchers too! On the basis of the material which does exist, we have endeavoured to develop the argument that small rural schools do have distinctive characteristics which can reasonably be thought of as potential advantages if we can escape from the assumption that the typically urban model represents the 'one best system'. If rural teachers can be encouraged to develop those potential strengths of their schools, and are supported when they do so, we have the best chance of enhancing the quality of the primary education provided in rural areas. That may not be an easy task, but so long as small schools serving rural populations are thought of as simply smaller versions of large urban schools, and are expected to function in the same way, they will continue to appear educationally deficient. In the previous chapter we saw signs of a recognition of this in some of the pilot projects that have been initiated in a number of rural authorities.

In this final chapter, we intend to give rein to our imaginations and to become frankly speculative. The issue we will address is one that has been implicit in much of what we have previously considered — the relationship between the school and its wider community. It is here that

the official and the grass-roots perspectives diverge most radically. According to the official view, the relationship is essentially a contractual one, in which schools are bound by their formal responsibilities to parents, local authority and government to provide a satisfactory education for the children in their care. Necessarily, that contractual relationship is the foundation upon which education in any school rests. The question is whether, in circumstances where people know and have confidence in each other, it need be a restraint upon the educative relationships between the school and the community it serves.

A Contractual Relationship

In any assertion of the value of establishing cooperative links across the boundary between the school and its environment there is a recognition that education is not confined to what takes place inside schools. Children's learning and development is affected by their experiences both within and outside school. A contractual arrangement between teachers and parents acknowledges this in relation to pupils' home life, but it resists the idea that the character of community life outside the home might be significantly associated with children's development, or at least that the school can assume any responsibility for it.

An appropriate starting point for examining a contractual relationship is the Plowden Report. It firmly established in all subsequent educational planning the virtue of good relationships between a pupil's school and his home community and initiated in its train a welter of research and policy making designed to strengthen the home-school connection. The Report boldly asserted that:

> '... educational policy should explicitly recognize the power of the environment upon the school and the school upon the environment'. (para 80)

Its conception of 'environment' was, however, somewhat narrower than is implied in this statement of an organic, mutual connection; for it was restricted to parents. Thus, in its section 'The Home, School and Neighbourhood', it did not explore what the relationship might be between the school and the neighbourhood *as neighbourhood,* but perceived the latter as constituting parents (or, more accurately, occupational categories of parents). It championed the need for schools to possess close links with their communities, but its emphasis throughout was on parents. The significance of parents was that of their attitudes and child rearing practices, which may or may

not have supported the work of the school, they affected children's responses to, and capacity to benefit from, schooling. The purpose of close links with the community was to enable the school more effectively to influence the parents and bring them into closer agreement with the practices of the primary classroom so that they could reinforce the work of the teachers.

The view that neighbourhood or community is essentially comprised of parents as *parents* leads to the view that other adults in the local environment outside the school cannot be thought of as being significantly related to the primary school. Even when the Report proposed a 'community school' it virtually excluded the community:

> 'Our third general purpose is about the 'community school'. By this we mean a school which is open beyond the ordinary school hours for the use of children, parents and, exceptionally, other members of the community'. (para 12)

Its view of the community school in the rural area was, in fact, no different from that which it prescribed for inner cities — a colonizing strategy whereby the influence of the school could be extended beyond its normal boundary and outside its normal hours in an attempt to buttress its educational programmes with its pupils.[2]

The Plowden Report, more than any other educational publication, made the value of school and community links an indispensable element in educational policy. It would now be difficult to envisage anybody responsible for planning primary school provision being insensitive to it, and as we have seen earlier, the creation and maintenance of these links have been identified as constituting one of the essential managerial functions of all primary schools. It also legitimated a particular view of those links which has been incorporated into the official perspective. Except where LEAs designate schools as 'community schools' (and there is much ambiguity in the way that is interpreted) the link is a contractual relationship with parents.

According to this, the responsibility of the local education authority is limited to ensuring that all children receive their educational entitlement, a curriculum which is broad, balanced, differentiated in line with their individual abilities, but relevant to their needs and to national priorities. To this end, it is considered essential to harness the cooperation of parents in support of the school's enterprise, but any more extensive concern, say for example, with the social development of the wider community, is beyond the scope of that contractual obligation. The school is not a resource for the local neighbourhood, except in so far as it provides its children with their primary education;

similarly, the local environment cannot be called upon as a resource for the school except in so far as certain elements of it (the parents) can be enlisted to lend their encouragement to the work of the professional teachers. It may be that the presence of a school does contribute to the formation of a sense of local identity, just as it is possible that other adults may contribute to the school, for instance through fund-raising, but they are incidental bonuses. They are outside the contractual relationship between the LEA and its professional representatives in each school, and the parents of the school's pupils.

It is perhaps useful to look at this in the light of contemporary efforts to improve the quality of schooling because what underpins recent government inspired moves is the view that education is a generic endeavour. The aims for education are considered to be common to all pupils; their needs are uniformly prescribed and seen as being independent of the social context in which they are growing up. It follows from this that the curriculum which pupils encounter should be the same, regardless of where they live. It will, for sure, have to be differentiated according to differences in their abilities, but there is no suggestion that it might need to be differentiated according to locality, because no matter what the nature of the social background, they enjoy the same curriculum entitlement which can be indicated through a national curriculum framework. Similarly, schools can also be perceived as institutions which are independent of their social or regional location; they exist to meet the common needs of pupils, and national priorities. Any one school is, by this reckoning, an outpost of a national system of educational provision; its quality is determined by the quality of its teaching staff, assisted by whatever parental support can be engendered for their efforts. Into this model of state education, a contractual relationship between teachers and parents fits perfectly well.

Equal Opportunity and a Relevant Curriculum

There is, throughout this official perspective, a self-evident and genuine concern not only with enhancing the quality of education, but also with improving educational equality. Notwithstanding the considerable variations that prevail between one LEA and another in the resources they provide for education, it seems eminently fair to insist that all children, whether they live in affluent suburbs, remote hill farms or in decaying inner cities, should receive the same curricular

opportunities. Bolton (1985) explains why these two concerns have led to the current Governmental drive to establish a common curriculum:

> 'It is also understandable that when a nation is concerned about its standing in the world; and about the maintenance of its standards of living and the preservation of its social and cultural institutions; it should, among other things take a critical look at the education of its young people. But perhaps not so well understood is why that parallel debate about equal opportunity, egalitarianism and social mobility should move from school organization and issues such as selective and non-selective education to an emphasis upon internal school factors such as the curriculum and the ways in which teaching and learning are organized'. (p209)

The desire to achieve equal opportunities for all pupils has been a recurrent theme of educational reform in most developed countries, usually with similar results for rural schools. In Norway, for instance, there were two separate school laws (one for schools in towns and one for schools in rural areas) until 1959. Successive legislation has brought about a standardization of the state educational system so that rural schools have increasingly come to resemble town schools: multi-aged classes have been discouraged; the rural school year has been made comparable to the urban school calendar; the curriculum has become approximately equivalent and, so far as physical (and social) barriers have permitted, groups of small schools have been consolidated. Solstad (1981) points out:

> 'The impetus for these legislative reforms was the struggle for equality of educational opportunity'. (p303)

But whatever the motive, the cost of a common curriculum is that it renders the curricular principle of 'relevance' somewhat problematic. Part of the reason why the particular social environment that children inhabit is not considered material to a consideration of the education that they should receive is because the personal development of individual pupils and the social development of the communities in which they happen to live are viewed as separate things. In as much as they intersect at all, it is through the prescription that *their* curriculum should be relevant to enable them to deal more competently with their life outside school and eventually beyond compulsory schooling. The exemplars that are given of relevance are, however, invariably in terms of *national* priorities rather than *local* needs.

Dearden (1981) offers one criticism of this, from the point of view of the individual pupil:

> 'What perhaps needs to be said . . . is that it is a fallacy, and also an educationally disastrous mistake to infer from the premise that society needs x the conclusion that therefore everyone must learn x, whether 'x' is engineering, science, electronics or French . . . it looks very much like a species of overkill to impose a compulsory 'national need' version of balance on everyone, regardless of ability and inclination, or more likely inability or disinclination'. (p116)

And similarly, when we survey the immense variations that exist in standards of living between one locality and another, and the significant social and cultural differences that exist, the confidence in some communities and the deprivation in others, it starts to become clear that relevance in the curriculum is attainable only to the extent that LEAs are able to respond to their own social contexts. A relevant curriculum, suggests the Inspectorate:

> '. . . increases [childrens] understanding of themselves and the world in which they are growing up; raises their confidence and competence in controlling events and coping with widening expectations and demands; and progressively equips them with the knowledge and skills needed in adult working life'. (HMI, 1985a, para 116)

The world in which they are growing up is not only the cosmopolitan world of national priorities, but the more immediate community of local needs. For primary age children especially, it is in the *local* context that they can have the opportunities to develop the competence to shape their lives and to respond to the demands and expectations that are placed upon them. But that is not an individualistic enterprise, for we are all of us social beings — the unique product of the interplay between our individual personality and a particular set of cultural circumstances which have influenceed us and which we, in turn, can influence. At the earliest age, a child brings to school the stamp of the community upon his or her upbringing, in thoughts, feelings and attitudes, and is also, in however small a way, capable of contributing to the development of that community. In fact, we would argue, being able to contribute to the social development of the community from which children substantially draw their identity is as fund[illegible] way as any of encouraging their individual development.

[illegible]y set of aims for schooling is an answer to the question: What

sort of people do we want our children to be? That question entails another: What sort of society do we want ours to be? It is possible, therefore, to view the matter of curriculum relevance from the other end, that is to say, community needs. As Sockett (1986) puts it:

> 'Yet what is crucial is for the communities themselves to be helped to articulate a perspective on their future. Young people, and the schools in particular must be close to the heart of those debates. We need strategies which will allow the inventiveness of teachers full rein within such communities, accepting the risks that will entail. You can define it as a strategy of self help, or if you have different politics, community action'. (p10)

In short, national priorities are local needs, and a relevant curriculum requires schools to be responsive to their communities.

Local Needs, Personal Identity and Schools

Hargreaves (1982) in his examination of the adolescent youngster in an urban setting depicts, unsentimentally, the decline of community. Particularly, he focuses upon the former workaday urban neighbourhood and demonstrates how similarities of occupation, the interlocking of kin and friendship networks and the intermingling of old and young have substantially disappeared. In the face of change and diversification in industry and occupation, the rational planning of new housing developments and the attendant dispersal of established relationships, bonding community interests have dissolved. Hargreaves harbours no nostalgia for the dirt and the disease of the pre-war working class 'real community'. The point he seeks to emphasize is that the organic social connections which are the cement of community have decayed.

The dissolution of these communities has yielded for many people the relative privatization of their lives and relief from the social density of a crowded neighbourhood. However, the price to be paid has been the cost of personal anonymity. The consequences for the child growing up in the relatively depersonalized environments which have come to replace the older community settings, Hargreaves sees as serious. The fragmentation or loss of traditional cultural and social structure results in the absence of a set of community relationships wherein a child can find a clear cut identity. Put another way, the child has difficulty in finding a range of voices which provides a

degree of harmony in responding to the question 'Who am I?' Within such a social vacuum, the problem for the child becomes that of finding a community within which he can root an identity. For Hargreaves, and indeed for many other commentators, the youth culture found in many urban schools represents 'an attempt to recover a sense of solidarity and community which is now lacking in the home environment'.

It might be argued that this thesis pertains to the secondary school adolescent, whereas our concern is with younger, primary children. To that we can reply that if, in urban areas, cohorts of youngsters do face problems of identity, such problems do not wait upon secondary transfer for their manifestation. Among teachers in primary schools there is concern over the signs of rootlessness and the disconnection between family, neighbourhood and school. A frequently voiced anxiety for such teachers is that to do with the difficulty of developing adequate parent-teacher contact and particularly the problem summed up in the statement, 'You never see the parents you really wish to see'. That very common remark betokens the degree of anonymity which many urban primary teachers would wish to see defeated.

It might also be objected that this thesis applies only to working class inner-city areas or redevelopment estates. Hargreaves doubts that, arguing that 'the middle classes have not remained entirely unaffected by many of the same social forces that have transformed working class life'.

> 'Behind the oak doors of detached houses on fashionable housing estates are hidden many personal and social problems which require solution: loneliness and distress and neglect do not belong uniquely to the working class "deprived"'. (p129)

Nor, we would want to add, do they belong uniquely to urban areas of the country because rural communities too have changed dramatically over the same period. While it is rare to find large parts of villages that have been demolished and reconstructed elsewhere according to a planner's blueprint, it is certainly the case that many who formerly worked on the land have moved into agricultural services and processing plants, whilst others continue to live in the village yet work in the town. In many rural settlements, familiar institutions, the pub and the shops have gone and the parish church no longer possesses individual rights to the vicar; rail links have been severed and bus timetables curtailed. Private housing developments brought their quota of incomers, committed in some ways to

rural living, yet urban in their bread winning. That said, it remains the case that, relative to urban contexts, present day rural communities are more likely to be characterized by face-to-face relationships. Networks of relationships are more likely to be overlapping because in small communities, a variety of groups and activities can only be sustained through community members filling more than one role. It is the absence of such relationships and networks that is the essence of Hargreaves' concern for the decline of community in urban areas. Even so, it is clear that the often romantic depictions of village life which appear in many Case for Retention documents owe as much to imagination as they do to experienced reality. In fact, if the real experience did not often contain an element of malaise, a sense of rural decline and of rural areas being neglected by central decision makers, the school campaign groups may have been less urgently stimulated into action.

Faced with these social trends which are to be found in quite diverse localities, and the implications they carry for the child's development of identity, many schools have become responsive to their communities. In secondary and in primary schools, and in urban and rural areas alike, there are teachers who work to the principles of strengthening the connections between school and neighbourhood, or of making extensive use of their cultural surroundings to give shape and relevant purpose to the curricular activities that they present to their pupils. Hargreaves offers a useful four-fold typology of these moves which, although set in the context of urban comprehensive schools, have general applicability.

First, there is the attempt to recreate a feeling of community within the schools, a strategy which usually takes the form of reducing the hierarchical social distance between teachers and pupils and between the head and the rest of the staff. A second strategy is to invite greater participation in the school's activities by those in the outside community; at the very least this implies elected representatives on parent-teacher associations and it can involve parents in certain kinds of classroom activities. A third development, although largely an option for secondary schools, turns the school into a community centre, sharing its facilities (and occasionally its educational resources) with other community groups. Finally, there is the attempt to develop a community-centred curriculum, to move beyond changes in the structure of the school and to alter the content of what is taught. The chief thrust of Hargreaves' work is in this last direction, the advocacy of a locally relevant curriculum for all of a school's pupils.

There is nothing in any of these strategies, designed as they are to alter the relationship between school and community, which is intrinsic to any particular locality; they appear as feasible (or as difficult) in a large primary school in an urban conurbation as in a remote village. Yet, when we look carefully at how they might be accomplished, certain differences can be detected which relate to the size of the school and the nature of its catchment community.

Consider the first development that Hargreaves mentions, the attempt to establish a sense of community within the schools itself. We have seen from our earlier discussion how the size and the formal structure of the school shapes peer group relationships. The extended peer group in the small school is an embryonic community of pupils, reinforced particularly, in those cases where the school serves a single village, by out-of-school relationships. In the larger school, with several forms in each year group, the organization of single age classes inhibits the formation of communal relationships which cut across those categories. A different strategy is required, which is why some headteachers of large schools, which could be organized conventionally, prefer multi-age, or as it is familiarly known, 'family' grouping. Similarly, the close, personalized relationships between teachers and pupils, the 'family atmosphere' that is acknowledged to be one of the major characteristics of many small rural schools is conducive to creating among pupils a sense of communal belonging. And among the teachers, the small size of the staff and above all, the fact that the head is a full-time teacher, makes it easier for him, if he so wishes, to build an element of professional equality into their relationships. Larger schools have to work within the constraints that a more formal structure imposes.

The same is true when schools endeavour to involve members of the outside community in the school's activities. The greater scale of the school's operations and the more probable anonymity of urban neighbourhoods in which a lesser proportion of parents will know each other, mean that urban schools invariably rely on the formal mechanisms of parent-teacher association meetings and written communications. A rural school, whether it wishes it or not, it caught up in a web of informal relationships (which are likely to include non-parents as well as parents of the current pupils); all of the school's ancillary workers are liable to live locally and to know, and be known by, many others. The school is accessible to the outside community in a way that urban schools rarely can be, because its connections are more organic.

In making these comments, we are not intending to draw any

invidious comparisons, but simply to reiterate what we have been arguing throughout this book — that schools are different by virtue of their size, their location and the structure of the communities they serve. Teachers must work with the opportunities and within the constraints that their situation provides, wherever they are found. The following little incident that we were told about is a perfect illustration. A chief education officer, in his monthly schools newsletter, suggested that it would be a worthwhile idea for small groups of parents to be invited to take lunch at the school; through informal conversation over the table they might gain a better understanding of the teachers' work with their children and the teachers could get to know them better. The head of a two-teacher school, perhaps seeing the suggestion as more mandatory than the CEO intended, said, as she was chatting to a group of parents in the playground at the end of the school day, 'I wonder if you would like to come, a few at a time, and have lunch in the school?'.

'Why ever would we want to do that?', asked one parent.

'Well', said the headteacher, 'It would give us a chance to talk about what we do in school and you could tell me about the children'.

'We do that already', said another parent, 'Like we are now and at Harvest and the Christmas Fair'.

'Why should we want to do that?', repeated the first parent, suspiciously, 'Is there something up?'

Attempts to arrange informal lunch-time meetings or efforts to creat a healthy parent-teacher association are thoroughly appropriate in urban schools as means of extending the school-community link beyond a purely contractual relationship. In small scale rural contexts, where school-community relationships are more organic, there is a different set of energies that might be released.

Can we then envisage a small rural school responding to its community in the way Hargeaves finally records, by aiming to build a more locally relevant curriculum? Even to ask the question in a predominantly urban society, committed to the principle of equal educational opportunity for all, is to invite incredulity. It summons forth images of Morris dancing and rustic crafts, or the whimsy of the pre-war *Handbook of Suggestions* that we referred to in chapter 2. There have been some vigorous examples of that approach to primary curriculum development in urban areas, notably the Educational Priority Area projects, but these were indelibly linked in the public eye (if not in the project teams' view) with 'compensatory education' and making up for the cultural deficiencies of 'deprived areas' in inner cities. Would the purpose be the same in rural schools?

An example might help, and to expedite matters we will take a rather dramatic one.

A Locally Relevant Rural Curriculum

The Western Isles (otherwise known as the Outer Hebrides) off the north-west coast of Scotland, have a combined population of about 30,000 living mostly in small villages. Farming, fishing, textile manufacturing and an increasing service sector are the main economic activities. Primary education is provided by a very dispersed pattern of small schools which is characteristic of rural Scotland. Of the fifty-nine schools, forty-three have three teachers or less.[3]

Following local government reorganization, the Western Isles Island Council was formed in 1975 and became the spur to a series of interrelated developments aimed at invigorating the cultural, educational and economic life of the islands. The primary school Bilingual Education Project (BEP) was one component of this innovation, which connected with a community venture involving adult education and the establishment of pre-school play groups. As one of the principal project team members, MacLeod (1977) remarked:

> 'As with many other areas in the country it was felt that the conception of education tended to be rather restricted to the work going on inside the school. To a large degree this work bore little relationship to the issues and problems in the community. Even the language used in the schools was not that of the community and it is only now through structures such as the Bilingual Education Project that the language and the curriculum of the school are being closely linked with the community'. (p43)

Gaelic was the normal spoken language of 80 per cent of the islands' population; it had figured in the schools' curriculum but as a subject that was to be taught rather in the way that French might have been taught. Only in recent years had it been thought worthy for use as a teaching medium and local authorities in Gaelic speaking areas had begun to assist schools to develop curricular materials and teaching approaches for bilingual children. This was the aim of the Bilingual Education Project, to establish a curriculum that would enable children to learn through Gaelic as well as through English.

Murray and MacLeod (1981) saw the project's activities being underpinned by:

> '... the attempt to discover and to fulfil the special needs of the bilingual child in terms of the local and national communities to which that child naturally belongs'. (p245)

In the initial year, 1975–76, the project concentrated on the first three age groups; the work was then rapidly extended to cover the full seven years of primary schooling. From its inception, the principle was made explicit that teaching through Gaelic could only constitute an enriching contribution to the entire curriculum if it was closely tied to the children's out of school experiences and that substantial use would, therefore, need to be made of the resources which the local physical and social environment provided. Teachers who were enthusiastic about the project agreed that 'direct investigations outside the school would be an integral part of the work on any theme'.

Murray and MacLeod interpret this as a link between the bilingual aims of the project and the aspirations for a locally-based rural curriculum:

> 'The adoption of a direct, 'hands-on' involvement with the local environment was crucially important. Excursions outside the school provided the teacher with a new ambience which made it easier for those who had not done so previously to use Gaelic as a teaching medium. Similarly, for the children this field-based approach provided a learning milieu in which they were natural' more confident in seeking and exploiting fresh experiences than had been the case in formal classroom work. Teachers and their classes also came into contact — as part of school's work — with local people, so the community's activities began to impinge upon the curriculum. In the long term this will profoundly affect the interaction of school, home and community in the Western Isles'. (p47)

One discovery, especially as the joint thrust on bilingualism and on locally relevant curricula moved to more structured work with the older children, was the absence of adequate and appropriate reference materials in Gaelic. Teachers began to develop their own, based upon the language use and current activities of their classes. Books, sometimes partly written by children and often illustrated by them, were published, and non-book materials were duplicated and distributed through a variety of individually negotiated arrangements with local development agencies. Murray and MacLeod observe:

> 'The pace and scale of these ad hoc publishing ventures were new in Gaelic. They attracted considerable publicity as well as affecting people's attitudes significantly'. (p250)

They were not, however, adequate to meet the needs of the schools that were being generated by the work of the Bilingual Education Project. So, by combining with other projects within the development innovation (for example, the Community Education Project) BEP was instrumental in establishing a Gaelic and English translation commercial publishing company (the first and only one). It was based in the Western Isles. Murray and MacLeod comment:

> 'It fills a serious gap which would inhibit the development of a relevant education. It provides a resource to which the community has access, and its own activity should stimulate and enable the community to make greater use of that access'. (p251)

The news was not all good. There were difficulties and disappointments, some of which we will refer to shortly. The immediate question is whether this particular effort at creating a locally relevant curriculum for rural primary children which links the work of the school closely with its neighbouring community carries any significance for other rural areas. It is tempting to suggest not; the Western Isles are remote, cut off from the mainstream of urban and industrial society in so many ways, yet internally united, culturally and linguistically. Murray and MacLeod indicate the opposite conclusion:

> 'Although people in minority cultures may tend to have more need for new structures to compensate for the lack of adequate provision in the past, it is likely that the approach being adopted here will be of relevance to rural communities generally. In the Western Isles, the essential first step was making a firm commitment to the value and importance of the local community as the foundation upon which all development work in education, or elsewhere, must be built'. (p253)

That is the foundation principle. Reformulating rural education so that it demonstrates that firm commitment to the local community may sound innocent enough; it is actually radical. We can get an insight into that by considering the second case study in the first chapter. There, a member of Ings Downton School action group asked:

> 'Would all those parents go to all that trouble to defend a school that they did not think was providing a good education for their own children?'

The question was, of course, rhetorical. It not only conveyed its own judgment about the school, it also indicated that the parents felt they knew the school well enough to make that judgment and to form the commitment to defend it. That is something that education officers occasionally find hard to take seriously. 'How', we have heard them assert, 'can parents without any professional knowledge make an informed judgment about the quality of a school?'. If parents are satisfied, it is assumed to be because they lack the knowledge of anything better; they have only the memories of their own schooling, a generation earlier, as a basis for comparison. Thus, the argument runs, their opinions are tied to the limits of their own experience.

Here, from an official perspective, we can see a different principle at work. There is a firm commitment to the local children, to their educational opportunities and curriculum entitlement, but an equally firm rejection of the belief that local parents (or any other element of the community) can be the foundation for this. The notion of 'curriculum entitlement' seems to impute to education authorities the prerogative of guardian of the child's interests which might need to be protected against the ignorance or self-interest of their parents. Development work in education rests on the judgment of professionals. But this ignores two things.

Firstly, it overlooks the fact that each parent's knowledge of the school includes something that is not available to a local education officer (or councillor) or a member of the Inspectorate who is making a professional assessment. That is the intimate knowledge that is gained from seeing one's own children, not any children, but one's own children, going to and from school every day. Only parents have that experience. They know the daily triumphs and disappointments, the moments of excitement and the occasions of boredom. Through their children and their friends, through the casual conversation with neighbours, through the everyday incidents they observe and take part in, and their sense of the routines and rituals of the school, parents have a particular (but of course partial) knowledge of the school which is denied to any outsider. As Gibson (1985) expresses it, 'they know it feelingly'. Or, to put it quite differently, the professional is likewise tied to the limits of his experience.

Secondly, it ignores the fact that parents have hopes and aspirations for their children's education, which may well derive from local values, but which must carry legitimate weight, even when they differ from the views of professionals. When we looked at the broad aims that are held out for schooling, we noted that they were a set of ideals

for what we wanted our children to become, and no group has a monopoly, in a liberal democracy, on the right to make judgments about that. Sockett (1986) puts it well:

> 'Being asked to comment on the Cockcroft foundations list, say, as an item to be agreed within the schools' objectives, may not elicit too many enthusiastic responses from parents; yet on inter-personal relationships and matters within the ethos of the school *any* adult can comment with value'. (p9)

So the principle which Murray and MacLeod enunciate, if it is taken seriously, is not so innocuous. It implies that the adult community is capable of making a significant contribution to the education its children receive in schools; it suggests that a primary education can be based upon local knowledge; it rejects the distinction between individual development and the regeneration of community life. We need to consider each of these in turn.

Enlisting Other Adults

Adults in the community can, and in many cases do, contribute to the quality of their school's curriculum through their efforts as volunteer helpers. We saw this in the school we described in chapter 6. They made needlework and cookery possible; by their presence they made it possible for the whole school to be divided into small groups for one afternoon; using their time and their private cars they enabled the two teachers to take their pupils outside the school, to the museum, for instance, and to meet other adults (the potter) who had skills to contribute to their curriculum. But also their very presence in the school, the naturalness in the way the headteacher gave them responsibility, spoke of a commitment to the value of local people. We can only speculate, but it seems likely to us that the children heard those messages of partnership.

Ringby is not a unique school in this respect. The Rural Schools Project in Gwent which we spoke of in the previous chapter, enlisted local community support:

> 'Local personnel such as parents, farmers, craftsmen, clergymen and dinner supervisors were used in varying degrees by all the schools. Some were used to provide a stimulus for the learning of science whilst others taught small groups on a regular basis ... Even the school piano tuner was used to introduce a study of sounds in one school'. (p19)

Similarly, we know of a school in which the caretaker stays on, after her contractual caretaking duties are completed, for half-an-hour to listen to children read, and another, in which a native French speaker who lives in the village delivers a ten-minute lesson every morning of the week. In another school known to us, the secretary, a local person, was hired not only because of her designated typing skills, but also because she has grade 5 level on the piano. Examples are numerous. What is significant about a number of them is that the volunteer is not simply given mundane tasks to perform, such as repairing books (useful though that is) but is asked to sustain a contribution to an important area of the curriculum.

In all of these cases, local adults have been persuaded that they have a positive contribution to make to the child's education. That may not always be easy to accomplish, as Murray and MacLeod illustrate:

> 'For example, one teacher took her pupils aged between five and seven, across the moor to watch a group of local men cutting peat. On the way, the teacher and her pupils spoke easily about their surroundings in Gaelic (as the project intended). And the men, as they worked, conversed in Galeic as usual. When the teacher and her pupils arrived, however, the men greeted them in English, and continued to talk in English until the teacher intervened to ask them to speak in Gaelic, as they would normally have done outside the school context to the local children and the local teacher'. (p247)

Nor may it be easy to convince teachers' professional associations of the appropriateness of using voluntary help with the curriculum inside the school. Enlisting other adults may offend professional proprieties but is a practice of self-help which may become increasingly significant in rural areas and not only in regard to their schools. We will discuss that further before the end of the chapter.

A Locally-relevant Curriculum

Can a worthwhile curriculum be based upon the locality and avoid the charge of parochialism? Gibson (1985) expresses that uncertainty, arguing that for all that the curriculum should arise from 'community needs, ideals and richnesses', nonetheless, 'there is a world elsewhere':

> 'While the justification of the curriculum must be rooted in existing, familiar cultures, and must strengthen those roots, it

must also offer to students the potential to transform those roots, even to opt out of the culture, the community into which he or she has been born'. (p31)

Forsythe (1983) directs the uncertainty specifically towards rural schools. Not only parochialism, but a form of covert social control is a possibility:

'We stub our toe on a controversy which remains vital today. are rural schools to train children to stay or to leave rural life?' (p207)

But children, it has to be remembered, do not come empty-headed to school. They come with a wealth of experience and common-sense knowledge derived from living their lives within their various communities outside schools which, on the whole serves them well. A locally relevant curriculum in their formal schooling is not simply a confirming experience for all that they already know, but an initiation into ways of reflecting and acting intelligently and imaginatively upon what they currently know and do. If it is not that, it is not likely to be any sort of education, only a selection ritual by which the more talented are encouraged and enabled to depart their community. The purpose of basing the curriculum substantially in the things and the people that pupils are familiar with, is not to persuade them to remain, when their schooling is over, within their community or origin, any more than it is to persuade them that the good life will be found elsewhere. It is to allow them to look critically and caringly at the particular world they inhabit and to develop the skills and the will to contribute to its development. Whether, in the end, they choose to stay or to leave that world is another matter which will in any case be dependent upon a great many other factors, but such an approach to their curriculum should not debar them from leaving. What it should do is to enable them to recognize that they have a choice, and thereby, to make an *informed* decision about whether to stay or to go. What it should provide them with is an understanding of the nature of community, an understanding which they can put to use wherever they choose to spend the rest of their lives.

If the concern is that the academic curriculum may be distorted, it can only be said that there is no reason to suppose that the major concepts and ways of thinking that the formal curriculum demands cannot be derived from familiar surroundings. A great advantage in doing so, as many teachers acknowledge, is that it more readily engages the pupil's interest; the curriculum becomes relevant in pre-

cisely the sense that the Inspectorate describe, 'that it is seen by pupils to meet their present and prospective needs'. Moreover it has the potential to alter the relationship between pupil and teacher by making the child less dependent on the teacher. They already know something about the local environment and its culture (possibly more than the teacher at one level), and if that is the basis for the curriculum, pupils have some access to it independently of the teacher. Solstad (1981) makes this point in relation to an innovation designed to implement a locally relevant curriculum in the Lofoten Islands of Norway:

'It should be noted that within this project the teachers came to realise that the teaching situation with a locally relevant curriculum had to be based on new 'rules' for defining knowledge and for performing the roles of teacher and student. The teachers indicated that local knowledge had to be taught through methods different from those applied to the traditional school programme. The students should have the opportunity to benefit from their local status by discovering or creating knowledge about the local community'. (p317)

To the extent that teachers were able to work within this new frame, pupils became more as partners in their own education, with the confidence that breeds. That, we suggest, should stand them in good stead, whether they leave their community or stay. Either way, they can take it with them.

The Lofoten Project was, however, far from being an unqualified success. Reflecting on it at the time, one teacher commented, 'We have the ghost of a compulsory curriculum hanging over us'. Solstad remarks:

'Despite the fact that the new national curriculum plan (the Monsterplanen) has no compulsory teaching plans in the traditional sense, many teachers felt bound by that concept. Consequently, they found themselves facing the dilemma of deciding whether to direct their efforts towards local knowledge or to give the students a 'safe' education through the school's ordinary curriculum'. (p318)

Hargreaves makes much the same point in relation to English comprehensive schools. So long as they need to prove themselves by their academic examination results, 'there can be no full development of a community-centred curriculum in the secondary school'.

In the primary sector, perhaps the options are more open, but if

rural schools are to be responsive to their communities and if their teachers are to develop curricula that can be said to be relevant to their pupils, they will need the encouragement to innovate. The ghost of a national curriculum framework may need to be exorcised.

Education and Community Development

We have seen that the Western Isles project to reform the curriculum of the primary schools was but one of a series of inter-related innovations aimed at bringing about the development of those communities. In this respect it reflected a conviction that has gained momentum in various parts of the developed world during the last decade that educational improvement is closely connected with rural development.[4] It is a growing trend in Norway says Solstad (1981); McLean (1981) implies the same in Australia, and in America, McLaughlin (1982) concluded from an evaluation of a range of rural education projects:

> 'A careful examination of the case studies suggests that the success of rural school improvement programmes depends on how well they fit local community needs as well as local educational needs'. (p283)

The reason McLaughlin offers is that the natural linkages between school and community in rural areas means that what affects one affects the other. What is good for the pupil is good for the community! It is an assumption that not everybody shares.

Forsythe (1983), for example, suggests that it is at least possible that 'the interests of rural children and the interests of the surrounding community may conflict'. The reason for that, she argues, is because the community stands to benefit simply by the presence of a local school, while the interests of the pupils relate to what takes place within the classroom. If we view a pupil's primary school education as being largely independent of the community in which he or she is growing up and see its direction as being an academic matter for professionals to decide upon, and if we view the benefits that can accrue to the community as passively as Forsythe appears to do there is a real possibility of a conflict of interests. If, on the other hand, we ask of schools that they should be responsive to their communities, the simple divergence of interests which she describes, starts to look less plausible. But we do need then to ask how it is that schools, in

harness with their communities, might best foster the all-round development of the child, and contribute to community life.

Consider the following familiar situations; they are ones that we happen to know something of, but they are typical of the sort that can be found at various times in rural schools up and down the country:

> 'A junior class has been doing a project about the local area at the turn of the century. Much of the material they had to research for themselves and now, at the end of it, they are performing a play, devised by their teacher, to illustrate elements of their theme. They are in costume — some of which their parents made and some of which is genuine and borrowed from some older local inhabitants. The class is on stage at the front of the room; a group of adults (mainly parents) form the audience at the back of the room.
>
> Some older girls are playing netball in the playground. A mother is among them, coach, referee and organizer of the team. She once played netball for the county.
>
> The whole school is gathered in the canteen together with some forty or fifty old people who are being served with tea and cakes. They have all just returned from the local church where the pupils have performed a Christmas concert; they will repeat their performance in two days time for the parents.
>
> Three pupils are in the front room of a house down the road from the school. They are interviewing the lady who lives there about the evacuation that took place into the village during the early part of the war.
>
> A group of pupils is gathered round a pea harvester. The farmer has demonstrated how it works and they are asking him about the economics of it. He tells them and he goes on to talk about the harvesting in his grandfather's time when he farmed the same land.
>
> A widower has come into the school to see the head-teacher. He has received a letter from the DHSS which he cannot understand, she will explain it and help him to fill in the form.
>
> On a Saturday afternoon there are a dozen or more adults in the school, mainly parents and a few whose children have long since left the school. They are painting, plastering and generally labouring. The old school house is being converted

into additional space for the school. The local authority has provided the paint.

Three mornings a week there is a playgroup which is run by some of the mothers; it uses a room at the back of the school and a stretch of grass outside. Two fathers and a few junior boys dug the sand-pit'.

What can we see in these sketches? Most visibly there are some repeated instances of cooperation between people who, by virtue of their various connections with the school and the locality share something in common. There are examples of relationships being established within and across generations. In every case there are people of very different ages assuming some form of responsibility for what goes on within the community.

These are adults who are making a contribution to the work of the school. The most tangible example of this is with the paint brushes, and for a headteacher who wishes to enlist the active support of parents that is a good place to begin. That is where Robin, whose school we visited for an afternoon in chapter 6, started. When he became head at Ringby, he inherited a run-down dilapidated building and he set to work, with the local authority and the parents, to improve it. It was the quickest and most effective way to demonstrate his commitment to the importance of the local community because the results are so visible and immediate. It was some time before he spoke to parents about the curriculum. But the farmer, demonstrating modern agricultural technology and reflecting on the social changes on farms, the lady who once housed evacuee children, the mother who not only teaches netballing skills, but also shows what it is to have pride in the skill that one has, are also contributing to the quality of the school. And for all of them, the traffic is two-way. The sense of community pride is enhanced by a community asset which members of the community have helped to improve, and, quite apart from the enjoyment of the social intercourse, those who contribute to the school's curriculum benefit themselves. To teach somebody something is also to teach yourself something.

There are also in those cameos, children contributing to the life of their community; they are organizing and producing events which are valued by an older generation, and in doing so, they are experiencing what social responsibility is and what it is to have a voice in local affairs. They are also teaching the adults; the play for instance is their interpretation to the parents of their histories;[5] the Christmas concert is a confirmation to an older generation of the continuity of the

village's identity. At times such as those, young people become 'significant others' to older people.

It could be said that incidents such as we have briefly outlined could occur, and do occur in urban schools. That is quite true, but there is a difference. Where there is a close-knit network of relationships from the school out into the community, where, in other words, people know each other well, events sponsored by the school affirm a sense of community, not just a connection between parents and the school. Pupils can stage a play for their own parents as easily in an urban school as in a rural school, but staging it for the community is a more improbable undertaking.

It goes without saying that schools exist to enable young people to be more competent in their personal lives, less reliant on others and conscious of their obligations to others. To the degree that a school can successfully respond to its local environment, it can set in motion a further set of resources and help to foster what we might call an 'educative community' — people of different ages, in a context which is familiar to them, cooperating in a variety of ways so that they become more capable of meeting individual and social needs. Commenting on education and community development programmes in Australia, Randell (1981) asserts:

> 'A high community morale affects children's attitudes to learning'. (p71)

It sounds a plausible hypothesis, and so does the converse; the way in which children undertake their learning affects a community's morale.

Another way of putting that might be to refer to the idea of 'self-help', an idea which is gaining currency as a partial solution to the numerous problems of service provision in rural districts.[6] The direction was signalled several years ago by the National Association of Local Councils (1978):

> 'Clearly with the present economic climate and the general attitude of government to public expenditure, rural self-help will become even more important. Without it, even more rural facilities are likely to be at risk. If self-help is to provide acceptable substitute services or facilities, public and government alike must accept that it may take unorthodox forms and therefore be administratively untidy'. (para 28)

The test is whether the schools, and government, can recognize the potential in unorthodoxy.

There is one further feature of those briefly sketched moments which may only be guessed. Behind each of them was a teacher who did have a 'firm commitment to the value and importance of the local community'. In any educational programme the commitment of the teacher is a fundamental requirement.

The more that any proposed curriculum change calls for alterations in teaching method or underlying principle, the more important become the teachers as determinants of success. The Bilingual Education Project found this, as Murray and MacLeod realized:

> 'It became evident to the team at an early stage that a school's acceptance of the original invitation to participate did not necessarily mean that the school would welcome change, nor that individual teachers were prepared or even willing to become agents of change. The project works in an area involving complex and emotionally charged attitudes — toward language, toward schooling, toward cultural traditions and toward the local community'. (p245)

Some schools, it is reported, accepted selected aspects of the programme; in others there was a dramatic change to the curriculum. Teachers clearly differed in the view they took of the local cultural traditions as a basis for the curriculum and of teaching through the indigenous language. We are taken back to that underlying principle: '... the essential first step was making a firm commitment to the value and importance of the local community as the foundation upon which all development work in education, or elsewhere, must be built'.

In somewhat more ordinary circumstances, Forsythe (1983) makes a very similar point. Noting that 'relations between the teacher in a small rural school and members of the local community can vary over a very wide range', she reports:

> 'The evidence suggests that success is most likely to be achieved if the teacher has had previous experience of living ... in a small community, and if the teacher has a personal link with the local area'. (p160)

It helped if the teacher had previously acquired, through residence, an understanding of life in rural communities characterized by face-to-face contact, and also if they had kinship links with the area which 'provided them with a firm anchor in the community'. It is easy to imagine why that should be, but as a matter of policy, what it suggests is that there are good grounds for including in the training of

teachers an element which focuses on the nature of rural communities and their relationships with the schools which serve them. It would be of benefit to those who wish to teach in such schools. The identical argument for incorporating courses on teaching in inner cities has, after all, been accepted without question.

With one or two exceptions[7], such courses do not exist at initial training level and furthermore, the rationalization of teacher education which took place in the 1970s has resulted in its consolidation in urban areas so that now, far fewer students ever encounter a small rural school even as an incidental part of their pre-service training. At in-service level, the situation can be not very different. Newly appointed headteachers are often required to undertake a short management course. Crossman (1985) gives his experience of that, and it is probably not untypical:

> 'I was appointed headteacher in a four-teacher village school, a seemingly natural career progression, after teaching exclusively in urban primary schools. Superficially the task appeared similar to my previous teaching experience, the headship role like the one I had observed. The reality was different ... The immediacy of the situation required me to revise my assumptions and practice without adequately considering the causes underlying the problem. A short LEA course for heads of small rural schools reinforced my concern. The visiting practising experts were from large urban schools, implying a view that their scaled-down practice would suit the needs of small rural schools'. (p1)

The schools are different; the role of teacher and (especially) of headteacher is different. To recognize that would indicate forms of training which sought a curriculum and management more in harmony with the nature of small schools and rural communities rather than one which suggested that they should adapt large urban school practice to their circumstance and cope as best they can.

Crossman puts his finger on another characteristic of the way our thinking about education affects rural schools. Moving from urban class teaching to a small rural school headship, and then to headship of a large urban school is a common career progression. The danger is that because the urban model of what headship entails is so much to the fore, as well as being rewarded with higher salary and status, ambitious heads of small rural schools may merely rehearse the management style appropriate to large urban schools. But rather as Hadow recommended the practice of young teachers serving an

apprenticeship in small rural schools because of what they might learn there and later carry with them, about individual and group methods of teaching,[8] something similar might be said for novitiate head-teachers. In a small school in an rural community, they might learn how to make a school responsive to its social context, and that would serve them well if and when they came to be promoted to larger headships in different social locations.

The Future For Small Schools

So long as successive governments continue to reach for standardized answers to the questions of how to improve educational quality and how to ensure greater equality of opportunity, the future for small rural schools will look bleak. They will continue to be viewed as an aberration and the educational debate in rural areas will remain locked into the issue of closure, or mere survival. The moves towards greater centralization which we have been forced to remark upon frequently in this book, suggest that that is the most likely prediction. And yet, we retain a certain optimism.

Earlier in this book, we quoted Taylor's view, in 1978, that 'there must be a limit in a democracy to the extent to which educational policy can be pursued in the teeth of public opposition'. Nearly a decade later, and several hundred school closures later, we might be seeing just where that limit lies. That is not to say there will be no more school closures, but we do sense a growing disillusion with the belief that centralized solutions can answer local problems. In this country and in other parts of the developed world, there are signs of a growing conviction that local resources and local talent are required to deal with the issues which confront local communities. And paradoxically, there are signs that central governments recognize it also. In the previous chapter, we outlined some of the ways in which this has begun to take place with regard to education in rural areas. In this chapter we have been speculating on ways in which it might develop.

But however eager schools are to combine their strengths, and however rich are the local resources which schools might draw upon, some external support is necessary. As we saw in chapter 9, it brings in additional talents which the teachers have defined as being necessary; it also buys for them that most essential of components — time. In a predominantly urban nation, facing an unpredictable future, the education of rural children is not likely to be headline news. There will be no massive handouts for rural schooling, but the scale of

support may not be the crucial matter. In fact, if McLaughlin (1982) is correct, the American experience suggests that:

> '... heavily funded efforts [are] not necessarily more successful than those operating on small local budgets'. (p282)

What is crucial is that the support is used to make clear and then to amplify the potential advantages that stem from the size of small rural schools and the more intimate relationship they are capable of establishing with their local communities.

Equality of educational opportunity is best served by recognizing differences that inevitably exist and seeking ways of responding to them rather than by endeavouring to impose a common educational experience on all children. To identify and bring together the potentials which the small rural primary school and its community together possess is to address the matter of quality in relation to the social foundations on which, in the end, any worthwhile education rests.

Notes

1 Assuming the school to be held in reasonably high esteem by parents. If it is not, it is likely to be closed with scarcely a word being spoken.
2 The Educational Priority Area projects that were set up, under the general direction of A.H. HALSEY, as a result of the Plowden Report, took a very much more positive stance towards their communities.
3 Data from MURRAY and MACLEOD (1981)
4 See DARNELL and SIMPSON (1981), a report of the conference *New Directions in Rural Education* organized by Western Australia Education Department and OECD/CERI.
5 An interesting feature of the Lofoten project is that, like that in the Western Isles, there was a shortage of books about the local area, its economics, industry and cultural history. These, when they were produced for school use, were bought and read avidly by local adults.
6 The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has, for example, published a manual to encourage rural self-help initiatives (see WOOLLETT 1981).
7 For example, Aberdeen College of Education.
8 See chapter 2.

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THE AMERICAN TEACHER

CHAPTER 3: BARRIERS TO GREATER CONTACT BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

The survey identifies three types of barriers to better parent-teacher links. First is the degree of availability and responsiveness each party perceives on the part of the other. Second is mutual awkwardness and reluctance that exists in many cases. Third is the frequent mismatch in schedules introduced by job requirements.

Perceived Availability and Responsiveness

As noted briefly in the previous chapter, parents and teachers have quite different perceptions of one another's availability and responsiveness when they need to contact each other. In this regard parents rate teachers very highly, but teachers give parents barely positive marks. Table 3-1 looks below the surface to reveal which parents perceive the most vs. the least availability and responsiveness from teachers.

The highest ratings are given to teachers by suburban parents, parents with college degrees, and parents of elementary school children. Parents of high school students are less impressed, as are parents who themselves did not graduate from high school.

Table 3-2 shows which teachers report the most vs. the least availability and responsiveness from parents. Teachers in inner city schools and teachers in districts with below-average wealth see parents in their local area as considerably less available or responsive when they need to be contacted.

Mutual Awkwardness and Reluctance

A possible factor contributing to these differences in perceived availability and responsiveness is a feeling of awkwardness or reluctance about approaching one another. A majority of American teachers (55%) say that they have felt "uneasy or reluctant" about approaching parents to talk with them about their child (Table 3-3). Somewhat fewer parents, about one out of five, say they have felt awkward or reluctant about approaching a teacher to talk with them regarding their child (Table 3-4).

Female teachers are more likely than male teachers to have felt reluctance in approaching parents. White teachers are more likely than black teachers to say the same. And elementary teachers are more likely than high school teachers to have felt uneasy or reluctant. Reluctance is even higher outside urban areas than it is within urban areas.

Among parents the feeling of reluctance in approaching teachers seems to be a product of differences in social background. The most reluctant parents are those with income under $15,000 (24%) and those who did not themselves graduate from high school (24%). They may find it harder to relate to teachers who typically have college degrees and in many cases graduate training.

Mismatch in Schedules

Another potential barrier for some teachers and parents, which affects their availability to meet, is a mismatch in their respective schedules. A traditional time for one-on-one meetings between teachers and parents is during the school day or after school in the afternoon. And nine out of ten American teachers say that those times would be most convenient for them (Table 3-5). But only 67% of parents say that those traditional times of day would be convenient for them (Table 3-6).

One-third of public school parents across the country say they would prefer to meet in the evening, but only 9% of teachers say that would be convenient for them. If meetings need to be scheduled outside the traditional hours, teachers would prefer the morning before the school day begins rather than the evening. Parents opt for the reverse, preferring evening to morning.

Parents who are most likely to prefer evening meetings are parents who work full-time. As we saw in Chapter 1, 44% of all households with school children today contain either a single parent working full-time (15%) or else two parents who both work full-time (29%). Parents of high school aged children also prefer the evening. Teachers who are most willing to accommodate parents by meeting in the evening are younger teachers with less than five years experience, inner city teachers, and high school teachers. But even their rate of preference for evening meetings rises to less than half that of parents (13% vs. 32%).

The Need for Parents to Take Time Off From Work

Unless this mismatch in schedules can be overcome, there remains a need for working parents to occasionally take time off from work, or else forego direct contact with teachers. Over seven out of ten parents who work full-time report they have indeed taken time off from work to visit the school in the past (Table 3-7).

CHAPTER 5: FORGING STRONGER LINKS BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Parents and teachers agree on many of the specific steps that might be valuable in linking home and school, but they disagree on others. Their patterns of agreement and disagreement reveal the preferred types of greater involvement that each has in mind.

Who Can Take the First Step

While there is a consensus that teachers can take the first step to increase parental involvement, parents are significantly less confident that this is appropriate (Table 5-1). A quarter of parents think that only parents can take the first step. Black parents are especially likely to think so.

Steps Toward Involvement on Which There Is Consensus

Parents and teachers alike endorse a role for parents that includes volunteer work, supportive activities, and promotional efforts. For instance, both parents and teachers support the idea of "providing parents with information and materials to support or reinforce what is being taught at school." Approximately seven in ten teachers and parents at all grade levels say this would be valuable (Table 5-2). Likewise, both parents and teachers strongly endorse the idea of "having parents do volunteer work to help out the school." Six in ten or more of both teachers and parents at all grade levels say this would be a valuable step. And a majority of both teachers and parents endorse the idea of "involving parents as promoters and fund raisers for the school."

Steps Toward Involvement on Which There Is Disagreement

But teachers and parents part company over two other possible proposals that might also increase the potential involvement between home and school. A majority of parents endorse the idea of involving parents on "a management team to determine school policies." However, only 26% of teachers favor this idea. Likewise, a near majority of parents (47%) endorse the idea of placing parents "on committees that decide the curriculum of the school." However, only 18% of teachers are willing to go along with this proposal.

OBSERVATION: These findings reveal that teachers and parents have somewhat different things in mind when they equally favor parental involvement inside the school itself. From the teachers' point of view that involvement would include volunteer work, various supportive activities, and promotional efforts, but would stop short of any large parental role in decisionmaking over curriculum or school policies. Many teachers are very willing to consult with parents, but hesitate to place them in control. This is quite consistent with the tendency of

teachers throughout this series of surveys* to feel strongly about – and, indeed, to want to increase – their professional role in those areas which they consider to be mainly pedagogical in nature.

From the parents' point of view, however, many are interested in the entire gamut of possible involvements, including many who would favor placing parents on curriculum committees and management teams with decisionmaking power. This is a surprisingly strong expressed preference from parents to be involved in all facets of education.

Disagreement Over the Need for Outreach

There are several other proposals which are endorsed by parents but which receive much less support from teachers. "Distributing a newsletter to keep parents informed about what's happening in school" is supported by 68% of all parents and by 80% of Hispanic parents, who may feel particularly out of touch with the school. But only a bare majority of teachers (51%) think that a newsletter would help a lot. Sixty-four percent of all parents and 75% of low income parents favor "establishing a homework hotline which students can call for advice on how to deal with a homework assignment." But only 42% of teachers think such a hotline would help a lot.

Sixty percent of all parents favor "having the school give more guidance to teachers about how to involve parents better in the future," and black parents especially agree (72%). But only 41% of teachers believe this type of outreach training would help a lot (Table 5-3).

OBSERVATION: It is apparent that teachers place particular priority on measures that would result in parents better performing their role in supervising the educational progress of their child. While parents concur in this need, they also stress that the school needs to do other things – like establishing newsletters and homework hotlines – to aid parents in their task.

Teachers seem to see less urgency for such outreach activities. This could be because they suspect that teachers would be required to undertake additional responsibility without any additional pay or relief from other duties. However, parents – particularly low income and minority parents – feel a need for such outreach, regardless of who might in the end assume responsibility for actually implementing it.

The Metropolitan Life Surveys of the American Teacher 1984, 1985, and 1986

Other Steps to Improve Education by Linking Home and School

Both teachers and parents endorse certain other steps that could join home with school in an attempt to improve education. The most popular with parents is "having the school notify the parents immediately about any problems involving their child" (Table 5-3). Eighty-eight percent of parents think this would help a lot. Even parents who do not want to be actively consulted or involved at the school nonetheless do strongly desire to be kept informed. Seventy-seven percent of teachers agree that this step would help a lot, even though it is not their top-ranked measure. These levels of support constitute a virtual mandate for school systems to initiate some type of notification system.

Parents and teachers both strongly favor measures that would result in parents better performing their role in nurturing their child and in backing up the work of the school. Overwhelming majorities of both parents and teachers endorse "having parents limit television until all homework is finished" and "having parents spend much more time with their children in support of school and teachers." The latter is the top-ranked step in the eyes of teachers, 84% of whom believe it would help a lot.

Home Involvement Through Parental Choice Between Schools

An ultimate form of parent power in education would be the ability to walk away from a school perceived as unresponsive, taking the child elsewhere. Now this usually requires moving one's residence to another area or resorting to private schools. But it could occur even within a given public school system if parents were given the chance to choose between several different public schools for their child.

Some observers have predicted beneficial effects from such a system, which could put the parent in the role of a consumer making buying decisions and could place the school in the role of a seller of services in a competitive market. This section examines how much enthusiasm currently exists for using such a system and what consequences are presently perceived as likely to flow from such a system.

Which Parents Would Consider Changing Schools

One-quarter of parents say that, if they had a choice, they would seriously think about choosing a different school (Table 5-4). This constitutes a large initial constituency for choice and change. Approximately three-quarters say they are satisfied with their present school.

The most satisfied parents are those living in non-metropolitan areas and those with children in elementary school. The least satisfied groups are those living in central cities and single parents who work.

But the constituency for choice and change is not confined just to certain groups. It is present in all parts of the country and at all levels of society. This is because the minority who would opt for change, if given a choice, constitute from 20% to 30% of every demographic grouping in the survey.

How Teachers Perceive Parents' Sentiment

The vast majority of teachers correctly perceive where the preponderance of parental opinion currently lies (Table 5-5). Eighty-one percent of American teachers say they think that "most" parents would probably be satisfied with their current school; just 15% think that "most" parents would think seriously about choosing a different school.

Two groups of teachers stand out as being somewhat more likely than others to think that most parents would want to switch schools. They are urban teachers and black teachers. They may be correctly describing opinion in their particular local areas.

Perceived Consequences of Parental Choice

Parents as well as teachers see both beneficial results and some undesirable effects as likely to flow from a system of choice between schools (Table 5-6). The likely benefits include:

- A child could go to the school best suited for his or her needs
- Competition to attract students would force schools to improve
- Having a choice of schools would raise the involvement of parents

The negative consequences perceived by both teachers and parents include:

- Richer children would end up at better schools and poorer children would end up at others
- Some schools would be unpopular and children going there would lose out

Parents and teachers are closely split over whether in such a system a school would lose its identity with its local neighborhood. A slight majority of teachers believes this would happen, but less than a majority of parents thinks so. Elementary school parents see this neighborhood identity issue no differently from high school parents.

Parents who say that, if given a choice, they would seriously think about choosing a new school are particularly likely to see benefits coming from such a system.

OBSERVATION: It is hard to get reactions to hypothetical future situations. Advance impressions may or may not correspond to judgments formed on the basis of actual experience. In this case, teacher's impressions are probably more reliable.

Pre-School Daycare and Other Additional Uses of School Facilities

Parents and teachers both support additional uses of school facilities that could better integrate the school into the community, thus further linking home and school (Table 5-7). Over seven in ten of both parents and teachers strongly approve of "using school facilities to offer night classes for adults in many different subjects." And approximately six in ten parents and teachers strongly approve of "using school facilities to organize special activities for the elderly" and of "using school facilities to organize extra-curricular activities for students after school."

But use of school facilities for pre-school daycare programs takes much lower priority among both teachers and parents. Only about four in ten strongly support "using some of the school's facilities to organize daycare centers for pre-school children." Black parents, however, are much more supportive of the idea (65%) than are parents in general.

The relatively lesser priority placed by parents and teachers on pre-school programs connected with public school is underlined by Table 5-8. The table shows the support that exists for making special educational efforts on behalf of several populations of children in need. It reveals that three types of children are placed ahead of pre-schoolers.

Less than a majority of parents, and considerably less than a majority of teachers, think that education would be improved a lot through "beginning the educational process earlier by enrolling students in pre-school education programs" or through providing "daycare programs with an educational component after the regular school hours."

But parents are somewhat more sympathetic than teachers to daycare. And black parents particularly support pre-school and daycare programs. Seventy-three percent of black parents support pre-school educational programs, and 64% of black parents support daycare programs after school hours.

OBSERVATION: Parents as well as teachers affirm that the school is a major resource for the neighborhood and an integral part of community. They therefore endorse a wider usage of school facilities that go beyond the traditional uses in many locales. They seem to feel less so, however, when it comes to daycare for pre-school children. Perhaps they see daycare as less of a public, as opposed to private, responsibility. Perhaps they think that schools should do a better job of dealing with their current charges before expanding their scope to pre-schoolers. Perhaps they see the school as being best equipped and suited for dealing with children of school age rather than pre-schoolers, who may benefit from being taken care of separately from older children. Or perhaps they are simply thinking about distance and travel time between home or work and a convenient daycare center.

Educational Programs for Several Other Types of Children in Need

Enthusiasm is high for making greater educational efforts for several types of children in need. These efforts could further serve to link home and school in these special cases.

Parents and teachers overwhelmingly support the provision of special counseling and services for "children with emotional, mental, social, or family problems." There is also very strong support for school programs to involve parents, as well as members of the community, with "students who have special needs." A majority of parents and a near majority of teachers think that developing educational programs for "students who are frequently absent from school" would also help a lot.

In previous surveys in this series, teachers have shown great enthusiasm for additional support services within the school system.* It is now clear that parents also lend to this their voice and backing.

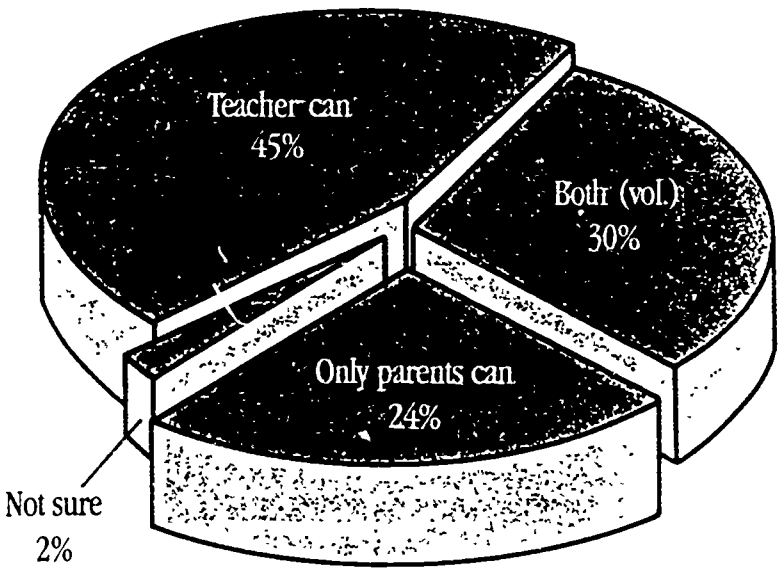
**The Metropolitan Life Surveys of the American Teacher 1984* and *1986*

Table 5-1 *Whether Teachers Can Take the First Step to Involve Parents*

QUESTION: In trying to increase the involvement of parents with the school, do you think that the *teacher* can take the first step, or can only *parents* take the first step?

PARENTS

Base: 2,011
%



TEACHERS

Base: 1,002
%

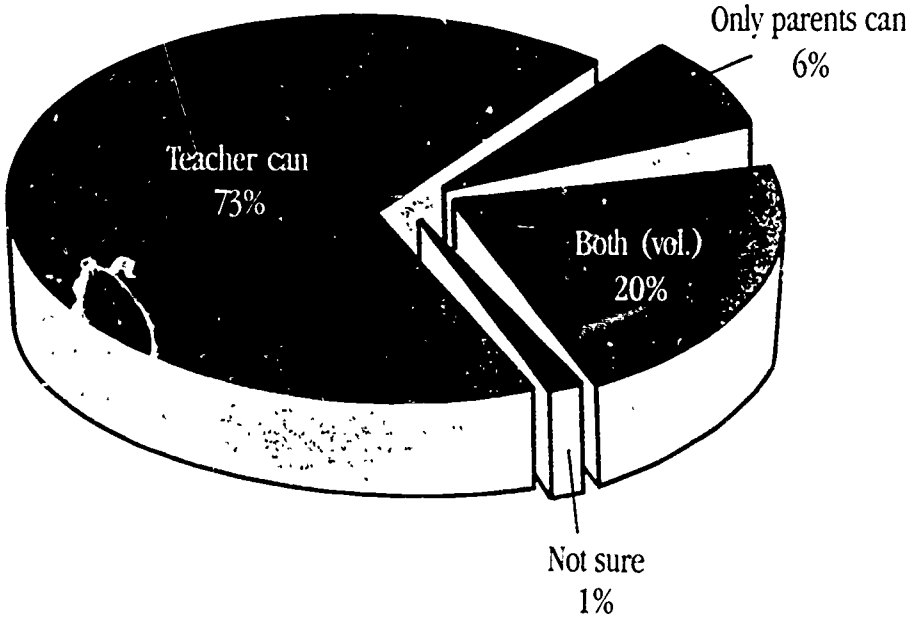
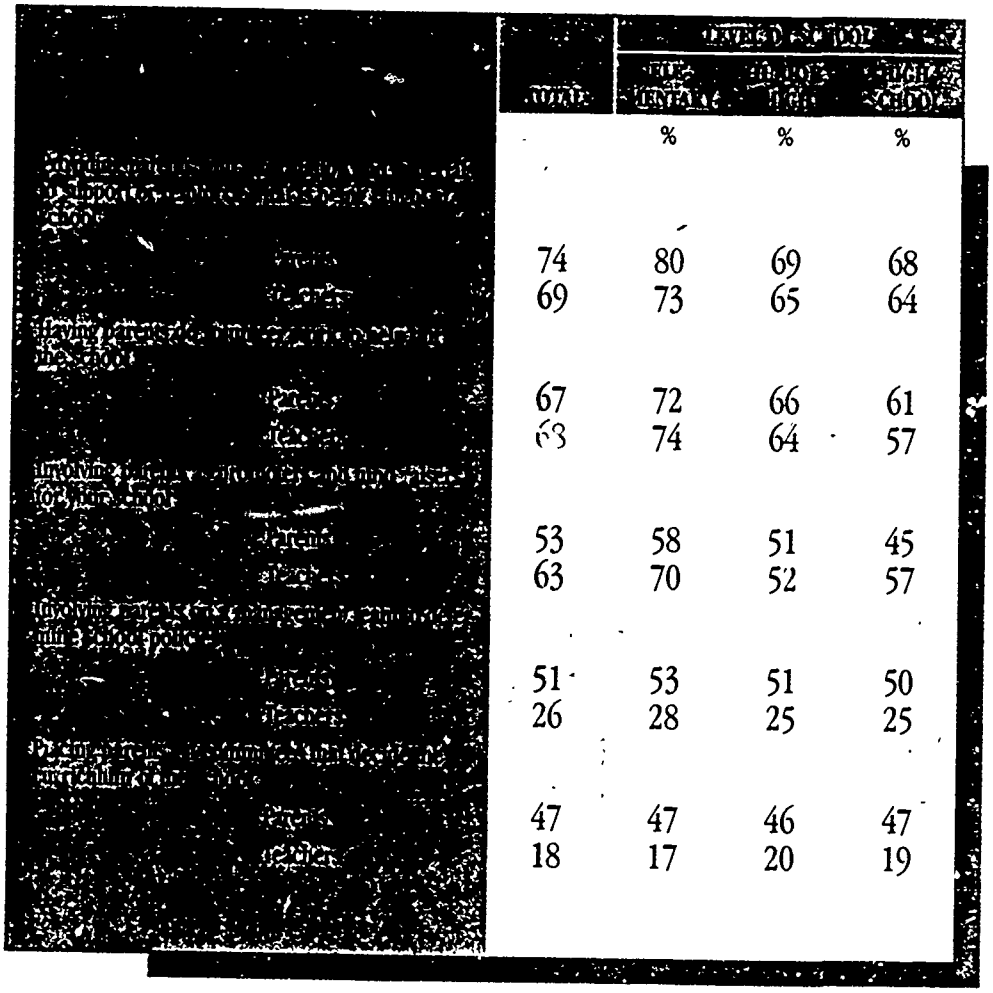


Table 5-2 *Links With School That Parents and Teachers Think Would Be "Very Valuable"*

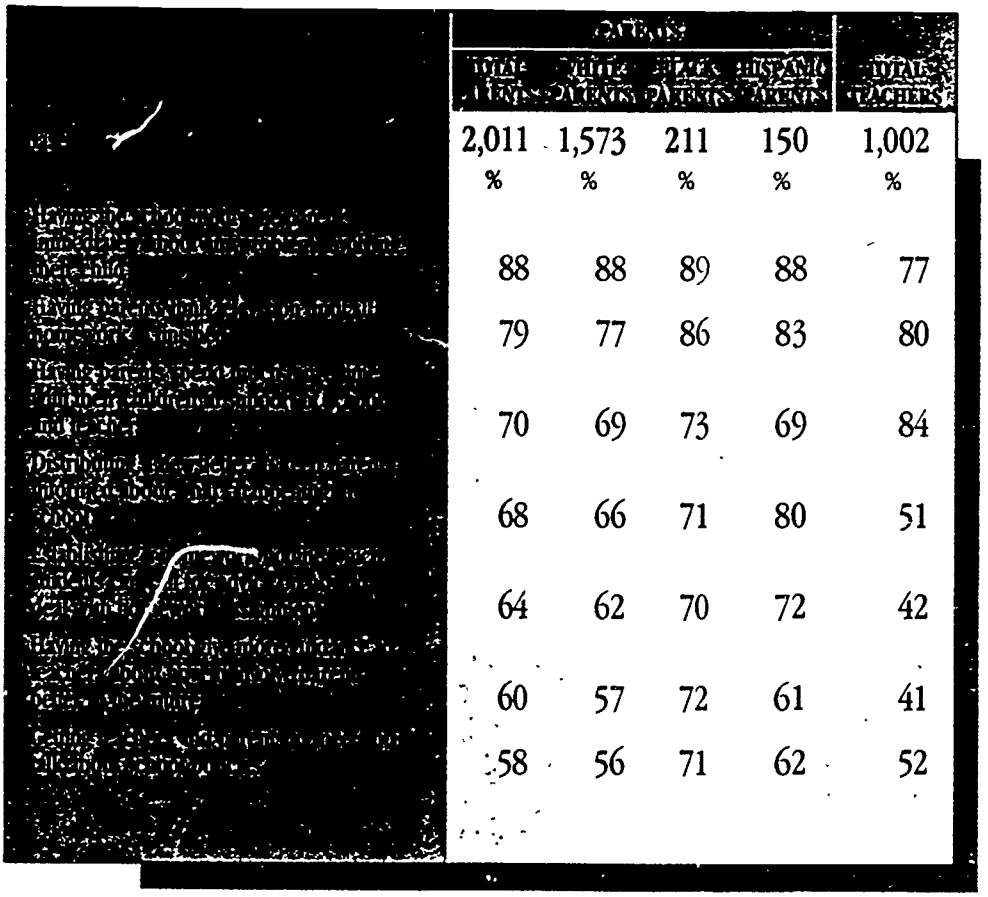
QUESTION: **Here are some possible ways that parents might be involved with the school. For each tell me how valuable you think it would be — very valuable, somewhat valuable, not too valuable, or not valuable at all.**



	%	%	%
74	80	69	68
69	73	65	64
67	72	66	61
63	74	64	57
53	58	51	45
63	70	52	57
51	53	51	50
26	28	25	25
47	47	46	47
18	17	20	19

Table 5-3 *Steps That Parents and Teachers Think Would "Help a Lot" to Improve Education*

QUESTION: **Here are some things that might possibly improve education. For each tell me whether you think it would help a lot, help some, not help much, or not help at all to improve education.**



	2,011	1,573	211	150	1,002
	%	%	%	%	%
	88	88	89	88	77
	79	77	86	83	80
	70	69	73	69	84
	68	66	71	80	51
	64	62	70	72	42
	60	57	72	61	41
	58	56	71	62	52

Table 5-4 *Which Parents Would Consider Changing Schools*

QUESTION: **Suppose you could *choose* between *several* different public schools for your child. Would you probably be satisfied with your *present* school, or would you think seriously about choosing a *different* school?**

		SATISFIED WITH PRESENT SCHOOL	SERIOUSLY THINK ABOUT OTHER
		%	%
Total Parents	**2,011**	**74**	**24**
Child's School Level			
Elementary	898	78	20
Junior high	368	70	29
High school	503	71	27
Size of Place			
Central city	490	68	30
Rest of metro area	963	74	24
Outside metro area	558	79	19
Race			
White	1,573	74	24
Black	211	71	26
Hispanic	150	76	23
Education of Parent			
Less than high school	238	73	25
High school graduate	813	76	22
Some college	440	70	28
4 years college, graduate	309	76	22
Beyond college	208	71	25
Family Status and Work Status of Parents			
One-Parent Families			
Not working	80	74	25
Work part-time	64	66	30
Work full-time	291	67	32
Two-Parent Families			
One not working	533	74	20
Both work, one part-time	417	76	23
Both work full-time	626	74	2[illegible]
Family Income			
$7,500 or less	130	72	25
$7,501 to $15,000	198	75	23
$15,001 to $25,000	397	74	25
$25,001 to $35,000	420	74	24
$35,001 to $50,000	436	72	25
$50,001 and over	305	77	22

Table 5-5 *Which Teachers Believe Parents Would Change Schools*

QUESTION: **Suppose that parents could *choose* between *several* different public schools for their child. Do you think that most parents would probably be satisfied with their *present* school, or would most parents think seriously about choosing a *different* school?**

		BELIEVE MOST PARENTS SATISFIED WITH PRESENT SCHOOL	BELIEVE MOST PARENTS SERIOUSLY THINK ABOUT OTHER	NOT SURE/DEPENDS
	-	%	%	%
Total Teachers	**1,002**	**81**	**15**	**4**
Type of School				
Elementary	450	83	13	4
Junior high	247	76	19	5
High school	334	80	16	3
Size of Place				
Inner city	113	76	17	7
Other urban	100	71	29	—
Suburban	248	80	16	5
Small town	298	85	12	3
Rural	242	85	11	5
District Wealth				
Above average	223	86	11	2
Average	424	82	14	4
Below average	342	77	19	3
Sex of Teacher				
Male	366	82	16	2
Female	636	81	15	4
Race of Teacher				
White	908	82	14	4
Black	69	68	25	7
Teaching Experience				
Less than 5 years	76	81	16	4
5 to 9 years	154	79	16	5
10 to 19 years	476	81	17	3
20 years or more	296	83	12	5
Training of Teacher				
College graduate	146	81	18	1
Some graduate credit	317	81	15	5
Master's completed	270	82	14	4
Beyond master's	269	82	14	4

PROTOTYPES

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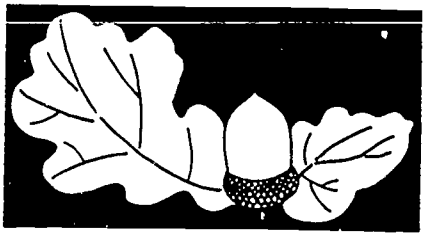

The School/Community Survey: A Useful Tool in Improving Education

by Terri V. Hunt, Marla J. Weatherl, and Deborah A. Verstegen

THE PUBLIC opinion poll is a tool often used to sample the political convictions of large groups of people. But, as members of the Foundations in Educational Administration (FEA) Program at the University of Texas, Austin, have discovered, such surveys can also be useful in improving public education locally. Unlike such national polls as the annual Gallup education poll, a local school/community survey provides school officials with a direct indication of the opinions of their constituents.

The FEA Program has been in existence since 1952. It is a nine-week, nine-credit-hour course that grooms selected classroom teachers for administrative positions. Applicants accepted into the program receive a stipend to offset their expenses.

Every summer since 1954, students in the FEA Program and their professors have traveled to Texas communities – large and small, urban and rural – to interview residents about their schools. Each year, the FEA class, which numbers approximately 20 students, formulates its own organizational structure for completing the survey. The following steps must be carried out: 1) communicating with the board and superintendent to identify issues of concern, 2) developing a questionnaire, 3) charting a random sampling procedure, 4) collecting the data, 5) analyzing the data, and 6) producing the survey document.

The 1984 survey, conducted in Levelland, Texas, grew from the work of three committees: sample plan/logistics, questionnaire preparation, and production. Definition of the sampling areas and basic planning for the trip were handled by the six-member sample plan/logistics committee. Based on population and ethnicity, the district was divided into six rural and 30 urban survey areas. Approximately 30 minutes were allowed for each interview, and every seventh household was chosen to insure a random sample. Both daytime and evening survey sessions were scheduled in order to achieve an adequate sampling of the adult population. The sample plan/logistics committee also developed a detailed itinerary, organized travel groups, and selected survey teams.

The six-member questionnaire-preparation committee developed the initial survey instrument. Using issues outlined by the school board and the superintendent, the committee constructed a 25-item questionnaire and presented it to the entire class for refinement. Because the Levelland district contained a large Hispanic population, the questionnaire was also translated into Spanish. The committee developed a computer program to expedite the tallying of data. Committee members then instructed the rest of the class in the procedures for recording responses.

Transforming raw data into a meaningful form was the task of the production committee. This committee drew up an outline for the completed document, which was to include a historical overview of the community and school district, as well as general information about the methodology of the survey. This committee also designed figures and tables to illustrate the findings. From these, a "mock-up" of the document was prepared. Members of the production committee constructed a flow chart to facilitate the production of the final document.

> The school/community survey makes future administrators aware of the importance of public opinion to school improvement.

The 18-member travel group went to Levelland by car on a Tuesday morning. The Levelland Independent School District (LISD) provided housing for the team at South Plains Junior College. Survey headquarters were set up in the LISD board room before the six survey groups began interviewing on Tuesday evening. Interviewing continued through Wednesday and Thursday, with one team of surveyors remaining at headquarters during each survey period to tally responses. On Friday, team members analyzed the results and prepared an 80-page document. A summary of the survey results was presented at a school board meeting that evening. The survey team returned to the university on Saturday morning.

At a time when public school reform has placed greater demands on local districts, the school/community survey can be a useful administrative tool for the improvement of education. The survey has proved itself to be a reliable gauge of public opinion. In addition, the cost and time involved in contracting with a professional polling organization would be many times greater than the expense incurred by a district for a survey conducted by the teachers in the FEA Program. The cost of the FEA school/community survey includes only food, travel, and lodging for the group. The school/community survey is useful to those who conduct it, as well. The activity makes future administrators aware of the importance of public opinion to school improvement. ☐

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Advertising Practices To Improve School-Community Relations

Effective school-community relations programs must be planned carefully, say these writers, who review five advertising concepts that should be considered when undertaking such an effort.

By Isobel L. Pfeiffer and Jane B. Dunlap

SCHOOLS ARE essential to economic development in most geographic areas. This fact is clearly illustrated when a specific industry is considering relocation: The educational opportunities available in the area are generally a major consideration. Not only should schools provide satisfactory education for the children of employees, the schools should also ensure pools of qualified prospective employees for industry.

Advertising means making affirmative statements about a product, but what is the product of the schools?

The process of education is the product, and the process of education in schools can be assessed. It must be consistent with the goals and philosophy of the system. The varied needs of the students and the expectations of the community must also be considered.

Some Basic Concepts

Five basic concepts from advertising that must be transposed into the educational milieu are: primacy of product, uniqueness, identification, timeliness, and price. These elements can enhance school community relations.

Since more than half the taxpayers in most American communities have no students in school, educators must influence the entire community to ensure continuing support of education.

Primacy of the Product

Primacy of product, the first advertising element, means the product should be kept consistently good. Not all schools are ready to make their activities visible as exemplary programs, but every school has some strengths worth publicizing. These strong areas can provide a basis for promoting the school system. Indications that improvements are under way in other educational areas can emphasize continuing school development to meet student needs in a changing culture.

In advertising terminology, the phrase "primacy of the product" relates to the basic worth of whatever is being described to the public. Even highly-promoted consumer products such as automobiles or toothpastes cannot be successfully marketed unless they are intrinsically good (i.e., the autos really *do drive* easily—if the ads say so; the toothpastes really *do prevent cavities*—if the ads say so). And, by the same token, if a school system is to be described in glowing terms, the school had better glow!

From decade to decade, our educational system has tended to retarget. In the '60s, in the post-Sputnik era, science and math courses generated much attention. In the '70s, the trend was toward individualized instruction and school systems hired counselors, required recertification, and in general, established a goal of "serving students in an atmosphere of academic excellence."

In the present decade, schools are relinquishing some of their humanistic goals in order to keep up with the electronic times. The educational opportunity offered to today's student in a school that is "with it" is computer literacy, allied with a sometimes anachronistic sounding back-to-basics goal. In short, the focus is the 3 Rs, probably computer-programmed.

Uniqueness

The subject of any advertising campaign should have something to make it special. Schools are no exception.

The function of a school system is to provide accessible education in the broadest sense—to provide basic cognitive materials plus a variety of "how to" experiences. How a school provides these opportunities defines its uniqueness. Whatever it is, it must be a well-understood quality so that it can be affirmatively described.

Identification

The quality of product identification is closely allied to uniqueness in that both qualities help set off the products (or institutions) being presented to the public. Whereas uniqueness is intrinsic, pertaining to the basic quality of the elements brought to the public's attention, identification can be superimposed. To some extent, a product's unique qualities are packaged in order to gain identification.

Timeliness

The memory of the public is short. Therefore, commercial messages should be provided when a product is ready and waiting to be bought.

In school advertising, there is a heavy seasonal/sport orientation. For example: fall (football), winter (basketball), spring (baseball-track). In order for an educational system to be publicized in a more meaningful way, however, there should be emphasis on scholarly as well as athletic achievements—and on classroom activities while they are in progress and not just as they begin and end.

National Education Week is an excellent opportunity for local schools to use state and national advertising to help direct attention to local schools. Open houses, back-to-school nights, or parent meetings can be timed to fall within the November celebration of National Education Week.

Price

The consideration of a commercial product's price often determines its position in the market place. For example, a $6,000 compact car would not be positioned commercially in competition with a $30,000 luxury car. The ad for the $6,000 car would stress low initial outlay, convenient credit terms, and inexpensive transportation; while the ad for a

Isobel L. Pfeiffer teaches in the Department of Educational Leadership, West Georgia College, Carrollton, and Jane B. Dunlap teaches in the Department of Marketing, University of Dayton, Ohio.

Internal	External
Students—especially those who are involved in school newspapers, annuals, and other extracurricular activities	Advertising agency owners who may provide consulting help or even specific campaign assistance
School board members who have many business and civic contracts	Sales promotion directors in advertising and publicity from large retail stores who may assist in implementing a school-community relations program
Secretaries who can create favorable impressions in phone contacts and influence persons visiting the school on business	Chamber of commerce executives who should be able to present schools to newcomers in the community
Teachers of business, advertising English, marketing, and vocations who have skills in communicating school information	Civic officials, e g., mayor, city manager, county commissioners, recreation directors, who are positive toward the schools and project favorable attitudes to others in the community
Staff members who arrange work experience for students and contact potential employers in the community and interpret the school to them	Alumni of all ages who can identify with the school system, know about its development, and support its programs
Coaches who influence student and community interest in the sports program of the school system	Classes in advertising in local colleges and who may be involved in universities helping develop specific public relations projects
Teachers who are sponsors of other extracurricular activities i.e., dramatics, bands, chorus, and who can cultivate community support for their groups	Media personnel in the community who can help get news and feature coverage for schools into newspapers, radio, and local television

$30,000 luxury car would stress prestige and comfort.

Just as cars are positioned, usually by size and price, so should school systems consider their own survival and productivity in terms of the dollar. Nothing brings this out more clearly than the retrenchment of educational services when hard times hit a school community.

School promotion should not emphasize glamorous, appealing school activities if they are not feasible on a continuing basis. For example, giving $100 awards to students earning grade point averages of 3.5 or higher makes wonderful reading in the school news section of the local paper. However, if the award plan is abandoned the following year due to lack of funds, ill will and disappointment will more than cancel the initial benefits. Here again the community and its expectations must be realistically appraised and appropriate programs developed.

Using Community Resources

School board members and administrators who are convinced that promotional activities are essential must look to the talent bank available in the community. Faculty members can help, but in order to prevent staff overload, administrators should also look beyond the walls for people to help build and maintain a school system's image.

Both internal and external assistance can be incorporated into a strong community relations program. Some of the potential resources to consider are shown in the chart.

Implementing an Effective Program

Effective school community relations programs do not just happen. They must be carefully planned with goals specified, responsibilities allocated, and evaluation scheduled. Unless promoting schools is a priority in the system, effort will not be expended to organize the

resources and actively pursue favorable public responses to the schools.

Administrators should recognize this and use advertising techniques to improve school-community relations.

April 1987 Volume V, Number 2

UPDATE ON EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN THE REGION FROM FAR WEST LABORATORY

More and more frequently, schools are turning to their own communities for support and often that support is not financial. In many cases, parents and businesses are the primary nonschool supporters of education in the community But this support is not without its share of headaches.

PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

Two decades of research clearly demonstrate that parent support for school makes a difference in student experiences and achievement, whether the support is encouragement at home or in school activities This is true for students of all ability levels and socioeconomic groups

Although there are many types of parent involvement, it is unclear how each contributes to school effectiveness and student achievement Involvement can mean that parents get ideas for home learning activities, or get encouragement to help their children with specific tasks at home

Many program funding guidelines now require parents to participate in the education of their children Head Start, Title I, Bilingual Education and Individual Education Programs are just a few where parent participation is mandated. Activities include attending meetings, making program decisions for the school as part of a committee, and constructing an Individualized Education Program.

More recently, parents see their involvement in schools as a way to change undesirable practices, a way to challenge the status quo, and as a way to make schools more directly answerable to the communities in which they operate Parents have joined forces to battle for such causes as better public schools for all, special education, and medical services for the handicapped

Understanding and Conflict

Involvement generally brings parents an increased understanding of schools and teachers This, in turn, contributes to parent support for education There are also problems associated with parent involvement in schools, and solving them takes time and perseverence

Involvement generally brings parents an increased understanding of schools and teachers. This, in turn, contributes to parent support for education.

Not all families have the ability or desire to become involved in school related activities Being a parent is demanding, especially when times are hard, or for single parent families Time and energy can be in short supply for many parents Some parents may want to become involved in their children's education, but lack the knowledge or skills they think are necessary Others simply don t know how best to support their children in school

Parents helping in the classroom can upset the delicate balance of discipline maintained by a teacher Questions of confidentiality arise when children have problems that other parents witness In addition, the authority of principals and teachers can be questioned much more closely when parents understand better how schools operate

Parent involvement can be frustrating to both the parent and the school Parents have to make extraordinary arrangements for childcare or leave from work School staff must work during hours normally set aside for their own families in order to hold conferences and

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attend special meetings In programs with mandated parent participation, many parents are contacted, too often, few show up Teachers face extra preparation tasks when parents help in classrooms Moreover, volunteer aides can be undependable

Developing Definitions

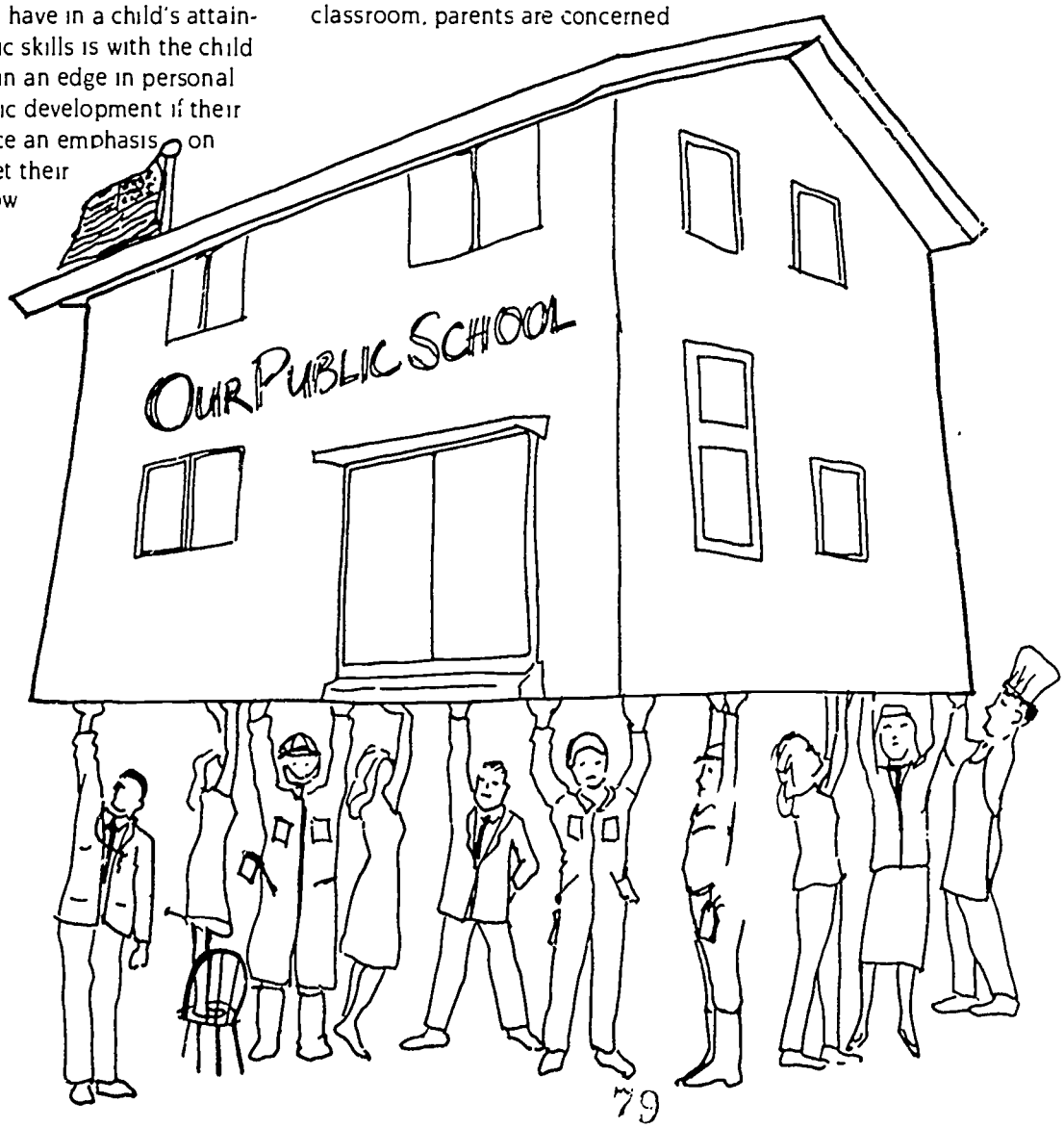
There is often confusion between parents and schools about what parent involvement truly entails Though it is assumed that there is a common working definition, parent involvement means different things to different people Both schools and parents need to clarify their understandings in order to avoid disappointment and mixed messages

The most meaningful involvement a parent can have in a child's attainment of basic skills is with the child Students gain an edge in personal and academic development if their families place an emphasis on schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continually over the school years

But parent involvement is manifest in many different ways Making sure their children have appropriate sleep, nutrition and a place to work at home are ways parents support their children's education Reading and responding to the multitude of memos, report cards, calendars of the school year, and notices of special events are other passive forms of parent involvement A more active involvement includes parents as teachers' aides in the classroom or on field trips Some parents actively instruct their children at home, either in conjunction with the teacher or ontheir own

Should they spend time in the classroom, parents are concerned that the effort has some value to their children Typical questions parents ask are Are we really needed? Are we treated with respect? How can we participate in ways that will help our children? There are also questions about how much leeway and choice a parent has in contributing time for specific tasks

When the demands of everyday family life are considered, it is not surprising that most parents do not volunteer as aides in the classroom or attend program meetings The challenge for school staff is to use resources in such a way that parents and their families personally gain from their association with the program



Students gain an edge in personal and academic development if their families place an emphasis on schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continually over the school years.

Managing Parent Participation

Not all schools actively encourage and support parent involvement In some schools the principal leads in promoting parent involvement, in others, administrators leave the selection and use of parent involvement practices to their teaching and support staff School site personnel generally are concerned with keeping the parent occupied on campus so as to keep them coming back, minimizing their disruption in maintaining classroom discipline, and reducing the amount of misplaced concern about classroom activities

Whatever kind of parent involvement may be promoted, there are few guidelines to determine the levels most comfortable to parents, teachers and students Often it is the approach taken by staff to build a relationship between program and parents that determines the success or failure of that relationship That approach can include what staff understands the working definition of involvement to be, how they think and feel about the relationship, and the posture and attitudes staff take while working with parents There are a number of guidelines that can enhance parent involvement.

1. For parent involvement to be successful, parents must feel they are making an impact on something — program thrust, child outcome, classroom climate, and so forth Parents also need to feel that in some way they gain personally, either in recognition, personal satisfaction, or growth in self concept from their participation School staff should request help only for tasks that are needed and meaningful, and show appreciation to parents for their participation and help. Having parents who are skilled in a specific hobby or occupation share that with students and school staff is a good example
2. The most enthusiastic parents are those who, in addition to making a contribution to the program, realize personal and family rewards Informal contacts and friendly relationships between school staff and parents provide a variety of opportunities for parents to learn about their children in school Parents can share with teachers the things the child does at home without rushing, teachers can understand how the child is at home, and how the child reacts to school at home
3. A parent's personal belief or interest in the program's purpose can be a strong factor that motivates and prolongs participation School leaders can solicit ongoing parent participation in developing the purpose of the program
4. Parent desire to participate in projects when they believe that the project and their involvement in it will benefit people they want to help or further a cause in which they believe Their participation is sustained when they judge that the project has a positive impact on the people or the cause
5. Participation in a project during its beginning stages, particularly in shaping activities, seems to contribute to sustained parent participation
6. Personal, informal relationships between parent and project staff inclines the parent to feel part of the school and personally appreciated. Listening and need sensing, and honest and direct communication on the part of school staff are important aspects of those relationships
7. The personal beliefs that school principals and staff have toward parent participation color and direct all subsequent participatory activities. They define the initial parameters of participation and influence the quality and quantity of participation Support for parent participation can be encouraged or discouraged through such things as how welcome the parent is made to feel on campus, the behavior of school staff toward parents, and the climate for discussion at meetings
8. The orientation of the school board toward parent involvement influences participatory activities School staff can change that orientation by advocating parent involvement
9. Of all parent functions, participatory decisionmaking seems to be the one that generates the most apprehension and conflict between school, staff and parents
10. Parent involvement is inhibited when school and staff violate parent expectations — fail to carry through on promises, fail to provide feedback, or fail to follow suggestions A good rule of thumb is "Make only promises you can keep, Keep the promises you make"

It is the approach taken by staff to build a relationship between program and parents that determines the success or failure of that relationship.

Sandra Kirkpatrick based this article on the work of J Ronald Lally, director of the Center for Child and Family Studies at Far West Laboratory and Joyce Epstein of the Center for the Study of Effective Elementary Schools at Johns Hopkins University

How Well Does Your District Support Single and Working Parents?

(Mark a "C" whenever you can answer "Yes" and a "O" when the answer is "No."

Organization and Logistics

1. Does the written communication of the school or the spoken vocabulary of its teachers avoid the assumption of two parents?
Newsletters, notes, all-inclusive notices should refer to "parent/guardian" or perhaps a friendlier, "family." Teachers should use "your parent" or "your mom or dad."

2. Does the school or its classrooms avoid celebrating events devoted to either parent, i.e., Mother's Day, Father-Daughter Banquet?
Imagine the problems of a child or an absent parent, or one with two mothers or fathers. How about a Love Day instead?

3. Does scheduling for conferences allow for evening appointments for working parents?
The majority of parents work, whether in a one or two parent home. Taking off from work is especially difficult for a single parent whose job may be jeopardized by days off for children's needs and illnesses. Try evening conference hours in proportion to the percentage of working-parent home in your school.

4. Is child care provided during conference time or other school events involving parents only?
Single parents of young children often cannot afford to attend school events such as parenting classes because of babysitting costs. Some schools use the kindergarten room and hire high school students for evening child care.

5. Does the school have a system for the non-custodial parent to receive report cards, conference notices, and other invitations, if desired by that parent?
Being non-custodial does not mean one has given up parental rights. Upon registration of the child, or through a notice in the local paper or school newsletter, these parents should be informed of the procedures involved to get on the school's mailing list. Many will not respond, but those who do will thank you for returning their parental status to them.

6. Does your school have a sliding-fee scale or other provision for children who cannot pay the usual fees for field trips, athletic events, and special supplies?
Only 38 percent of your single parents will be receiving child support. Single mothers are rapidly becoming the New Poor of our country. Make your fee policy well-known and easily accessible.

7. Are car pools a part of the planning for after-school events of the school without an activity bus?
The cutbacks in school finances have often resulted in fewer activity buses for older students. Children whose parents work are excluded from what might be valuable experiences. The PTA, if its exists, might be able to coordinate this service.

8. Has the school administration considered regular evening hours for the principal and/or the counselor?
Everyone seems to agree that school and home must work together, especially if a child is having difficulty. We must make ourselves accessible to working parents, if we want this to happen. Again, the statistics say that 80 percent of our single parents work, often at jobs where phones are not available and leaving work means jeopardizing one's employment. Some schools offer compensatory time for evening hours spent at school, to cut the cost of the program.

9. Does the school's registration form enable a step parent or non-custodial parent to receive information about the child's progress?
This form may also include details such as arrangements for joint custody, court restraining orders, and possible counseling needs of the child, especially if the move into your school was the result of separation or divorce.

Support Through Working with Teachers

1. Has a teacher-awareness workshop on the impact of single parent families in society and the schools been held.
Teachers are in an important position to observe and help children deal with the complexities of divorce. They are also unfortunately, able to promote negative stereotypes. Teacher education is of highest priority in any plan to be supportive of parents.

2. Are teachers using classroom teaching strategies, such as group work, to facilitate relationships among children?
During times of stress at home, children need a strong peer support system to build confidence in their own powers to deal with their lives. Children for whom divorce or re-marriage has occurred less than two years previously will be adjusting and reacting to these changes. Good relationships at school will help.

3. Do teachers arrange for evening phone calls and conferences when needed?
Perhaps there might be an incentive to encourage evening communications with parents: early Friday release, a whole school movie occasionally to allow preparation time for work normally done after hours or at home, or some type of recognition of the professionalism of extending oneself in order to encourage good communication.

4. Do teachers involve working parents in activities in their classrooms?
A common complaint of working parents is they feel cut off from what is happening in the class-

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room. One teacher sent home a list of items parents could make at home for the classroom. Another held a "make it and take it" evening for parents who wanted to be able to help their children learn, but could not come during the day to volunteer. The parents spent the evening designing and building educational games for home use. And, be sure to give advance warning about special classroom events and field trips so that all parents can plan leave time or make special arrangements to attend.

5. Has the staff given consideration to the types of families portrayed in its textbooks? Do their family living units deal with the several kinds of modern families?
Some teachers have found it helpful to deal with the idea of family straight on. What is a "family?" Do they all look alike? What are the most important things about a family? When stereotypical families appear in the texts, they label them as such.

Support Through Working with Children

1. Is there someone in the school who is aware of and able to provide counseling if needed to the child who is struggling with adjustment to divorce?
As society changes, more and more schools are being staffed with a counselor or child development specialist who is trained to both recognize and work with children of divorce. In the absence of this specialist, an administrator or teacher might be trained to recognize children under this kind of stress and help teachers deal with them.

2. Is group counseling experience available for children dealing with divorce?
Studies indicate that the peer interaction in divorce groups is tremendously helpful to children trying to figure out what their lives will be as divorced kids. Some schools without counselors contract with mental health agencies to run groups for a limited period of time.

3. Are library resources available for use for individuals and groups?
One school has set up a quiet corner in the library with selected books on a number of subjects that students might not know enough to ask for: divorce, step-families, death, self-esteem. Word of mouth has made it a very active place. One teacher organizes her book reports on themes, and one theme is "Family." All popular books on various kinds of families are listed for students' use.

4. Does the school provide a means for children to learn survival skills?
Both the Red Cross and the Camp Fire organization provide programs for children who go home to empty houses. The school should make these or similar programs available to all students, either on an after-school basis, or as part of its curriculum.

Support Through Working with Parents

1. Is someone on staff available for individual counseling with parents?
If there is not a counselor on staff, a referral list of agencies and professionals in the area, as well as support groups such as Parents Without Partners and Parents Anonymous is an important tool. Some school districts publish a "Where To Go for Help" pamphlet. Others contract mental health agencies for part time services. Schools often share intinerate professionals. It is important that parents know that this help is available.

2. Are a variety of school-sponsored workshops for parents available?
A parent needs assessment will indicate the areas of interest for most parents, including discipline, and other issues. No one is available to organize these programs? Involve the PTA, your own teachers, or local agencies that want to do some community outreach.

3. Does the school maintain a resource center for parents which includes information about community resources, support groups, babysitting, and recreation?
One school uses the main hall bulletin board for community announcements: another devotes a page of its newsletter each month to community news. However it is done, the school recognizes its position as the hub of community life.

4. Are provisions in place to safeguard children from parental kidnapping?
Does the school know who has legal custody? Who is notified when an unknown parent arrives to take a child out of school? Procedures should be in place and known to all parents.

5. Has the school considered cooperating with local agencies in setting up an after-school child care program?
Unused classrooms, portable buildings, and school gymnasiums are all likely spaces for latch key programs. The YMCA and other agencies are eagerly looking for schools and churches which will lease rooms for after school care. Private companies are willing to work with schools to establish programs. It is truly an idea whose time has come.

If your survey is lined with a row of "C's," you can give yourself a "very good" at the top of the page. You probably have already received that sort of grade, however, from the parents of your school who are very appreciative of your efforts to support them in this changing society.

A score of five or fewer "O's" means that you and your staff have been working hard to accommodate its new families. Those "O's" might be discussion topics for your next faculty meeting.

More than five "O's" may mean that you are operating a fifties school in the 1980s. Wishful thinking will not make those times return. As the first grade student said to his counselor, "I first wish that Daddy would move back in the house. I then wish that they would get married again. Then I wish that they would never get divorced ever again. But I know I am not going to get my wishes." That six year old is trying to adjust to his new life. Isn't it time that his school did, too?

Boost public support

Invite the community to learn why you do what you do all day

BY THOMAS FOWLER-FINN

DOES ANYONE KNOW what you do?

It's a question you should be asking yourself and your fellow school executives. The sad fact is most people—including some staff members—have only the vaguest idea of how important a role you play in running a high-quality school program.

That's what we discovered in the East Aurora (New York) Union Free School District (K-12; enr.: 1,850), where the need to enlighten our public became apparent after questions arose at school board meetings about the necessity for such a "large" administrative staff. We suddenly realized that misconceptions about the duties of school executives could have serious repercussions for public support.

So we took a closer look at the problem, and through discussions among school executives and queries to P.T.O. members (as well as what we learned in informal social encounters), we were forced to admit that we had a serious communication problem. If, as we discovered, our teachers couldn't describe the typical workday of their principal or superintendent, how could we expect the public to know what we do? No wonder people thought we were bureaucratic paper pushers.

We decided it was in our best interest—and a responsibility we owed the public—to fill in the blanks about what school executives do. Our solution was an evening workshop for staff members, school board members, and the public. We call it, "What Do You Do, Anyway?"

In setting up the workshop, we followed these guidelines: Keep it simple and interesting. Keep the presentations short. Offer people several sessions to choose from. And work with small groups so as to develop a personal relationship with the audience.

When the night of our workshop arrived, we were a bit apprehensive about the response we'd receive. Would anyone take the time to learn more about school executives? The answer turned out to be Yes. More than 40 people showed up, including school board members and (to

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Hint: Keep the lessons brief

SHORT AND SWEET—key words if you're thinking about conducting a workshop to educate your public about what school executives do (see main article).

Although community residents might know something about how you keep busy all day (almost all of them remember a principal or some other administrator from their own experiences), remember that this could be some people's first foray in school affairs since they were graduated from high school. So unless someone asks you a specific question, limit your presentation to a simple overview of your administrative duties.

Even then, you're going to be pressed for time, so warn speakers to keep their remarks brief and to the point. You also might consider allowing five or ten minutes per presentation for questions, but be careful not to draw out the program and turn the evening into a chore for your audience.

Another piece of advice: Limit your audience to a workable size. For the superintendent's introduction, our audience numbered approximately 40, but attendance at each of our six sessions (where the audience split into groups) varied from four to 15—small enough for our speakers to develop a rapport with people. And because school executives once were good classroom teachers, we knew this format took advantage of our speakers' strengths as instructors.

Finally, use visual aids whenever possible—charts, graphs, or photographs. We discovered our audience responded much more favorably (and remembered more of what was said) in presentations that used props.

How you organize each presentation is up to you, but our speakers followed a standard format we believe is effective and might prove useful. We asked all workshop speakers to provide the following information:

- ☐ Name, title, and information on professional background and accomplishments.
- ☐ Information on the scope of responsibilities: number of students, number of employes, size of budget, and so on.
- ☐ A job description and a brief talk highlighting special job functions.
- ☐ A list of goals for the year. (These aren't personal goals but official action plans that are turned into the school board and used during annual evaluations of school executives.)
- ☐ A description of an average day.
- ☐ A daily log of activities. (Each speaker had kept a log for two months as part of an unrelated school system analysis of administrative jobs, but the logs also proved useful for our workshop.)—T.F.-F.

our surprise) several curious teachers.

As superintendent, I began the workshop with a 15-minute presentation that covered the goals of the school board, my job description, our Board Action Plan (annual school system goals set by the board and superintendent), our school system staffing plan, and various facts about our administrators and their roles in the schools. To bring a light-hearted touch to this fact-filled introduction, I donned various hats during my talk to illustrate various roles played by school executives—a fire fighter's helmet for dealing with crises, a cowboy hat for roaming school grounds, and so on.

One part of my presentation proved especially interesting to the audience: a quick look at my mail. I went through each piece received in a typical day explaining who sent each letter, what subject was involved, which school executive I involved in formulating a response, and how the matter was handled. Our audience was surprised that the superintendent had to respond to such a wide range of topics—from litigation and state-required paperwork to staff in-service training and curriculum issues.

Next came six 15-minute presentations, conducted by various school executives, who spoke about their responsibilities, goals for the year, and a typical workday. The sessions were conducted simultaneously in different rooms and repeated twice more during the evening so participants could attend three presentations of their choice. (See accompanying article on page 24.)

Finally, we concluded with a 15-minute wrap-up session in which we discussed what was said during the separate presentations. We also took questions from the audience and asked participants to fill out "feedback sheets" designed to help us gauge the success of the workshop and give people an opportunity to ask further questions in writing.

We all learned from the workshop. For school executives, we discovered that our public was woefully uninformed about what goes on in our schools. We're so close to what we do that we sometimes forget the public can't always see our efforts. Nothing made this clearer than some of the questions participants asked, such as this one: "What do school executives do during the summer, when students are gone?"

Our audience learned the most, however, and sometimes we surprised them, especially when they learned that our school executives met biweekly to discuss the concepts of mastery learning. They hadn't realized that we took such an "intellectual" approach to the academic program.

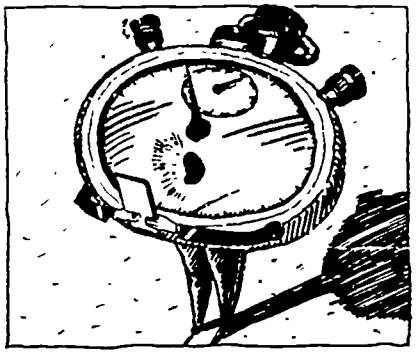
But best of all, what our audience learned is beginning to affect how the public responds to us. Before our workshop, people spoke openly about whether we had too many school executives, but that question hasn't come up lately. And where people once demanded immediate action, they now preface requests with, "I know you have a lot to do, but could we . . ." Public expectations are becoming more realistic as people learn how crucial we are to a comprehensive school program.

But we're not sitting on our laurels. We've been asked to repeat our workshop for our staff, the P.T.O., and various public groups, and we're going to follow through. Also, our school executives are taking turns writing articles for our local newspaper about school programs—a task originally resisted until the workshop proved how much people were in the dark about our schools.

Our workshop is a big success, but we know we've only made a small crack in the misconceptions and ignorance our public has about school executives. But we've made a start. Our workshop helps people understand our work. And the more people understand us, the more likely they are to help us provide our students with the best possible education. ■

Try our one-minute messages; score points for your schools

BY RAJ CHOPRA



THESE DAYS, if you're in the education business, you also ought to be in the advertising business. Like it or not, you're forced to compete with every other message directed to busy people.

You also have a new audience for your message: Only about a quarter of American families have children in school. Good news about schools doesn't circulate the way it used to, so you have to employ attention-getting techniques.

That's why the Shawnee Mission School District (K-12; enr., 30,000) in Overland Park, Kan., developed a series of "one-minute messages." These pocket-size pamphlets tout the good news about what our students and staff members are doing, and they take less than a minute to read. Their index-card size makes it convenient for people to slip them into pocket or purse for quick reference. The concise message makes it easy for people to relay the schools' achievements to their friends and acquaintances.

We developed our first pamphlet in response to a question that appeared on the cover of the December 29, 1986, issue of *Forbes* magazine. *Forbes* asked, "Are we spending too much on education?" We posed the same question on the cover of our pamphlet, along with our response. "Not in Shawnee Mission." We used simple graphs inside the pamphlet similar to those *Forbes* used in its article.

For example, the magazine compared national per-pupil expenditures and Scholastic Aptitude Test (S.A.T.) scores over a number of years. In our pamphlet, we added to those graphs Shawnee Mission's per-pupil expenditures and S.A.T. scores. The result was a compelling, easy-to-understand piece that showed patrons their students scored well above the national average at a cost well below the national average. On the last page, we listed other distinctions and awards we've won—recognition from the U.S. Department of Education of three outstanding secondary schools, Presidential awards for four teachers of mathematics and science, the selection of six Presidential Scholars and six Rhodes Scholars, and so on. Our overall message: High achievement at low cost is a hallmark of the Shawnee Mission Public Schools. We knew that tying our taxpayers' monetary investment to high productivity was a concept appealing to many business people.

We designed another one-minute message as a quick response to a question posed in another national magazine "Are today's children getting a first-class education?" This time, our answer was, "Yes, in Shawnee Mission." We compared our students' American College Testing program scores with those of the state and the U.S. in mathematics, English, science, and social studies. We included comparisons of the percentage of students who completed their high school education, and we explained our school system's accountability procedures for goal setting, financial management, and staff selection. On the back, we again listed our distinctions.

This might sound like a lot to put in a little space, but it can be done in a way that communicates quickly and effectively. Our one-minute messages have been so well received that they have become an important part of our communications program. We now develop a new one every month or so.

The advantages of the miniature format: It's inexpensive to produce (we write the copy and have it typeset and printed at our school system print shop at a cost of approximately a penny per copy). It can be produced quickly whenever we want to address an issue or event of current interest. And the pocket-size pieces lend themselves to a variety of topics, including test scores, curriculum innovations, community issues, and new programs and services.

We continue to use more traditional communication techniques, of course But we've found that through the one-minute messages, we can say a lot in a simple, concise way, using color and graphics to heighten interest and a format that encourages readership.

How many times have you said to someone, "Do you have a minute?" In Shawnee Mission, we've found that most people do—and they'll use the time to find out what we have to say.

SM Superintendent Raj Chopra writes periodically for various professional journals. This article appeared in a recent issue of *The Executive Educator.*

Reprinted with permission from: Creative Ideas for Small Schools, American Association of School Administrators, 1981, pp. 59-65.

Community Relations: Keeping School And Community As One

If there is one area where small schools reign supreme it is community relations. Because schools and community are one and the same. Tom Gjelten, writing about the state of small schools for *The Country Journal,* found several comments documenting this mutual dependence:

"In a small town in East Texas, the proprietor of the general store warns that if the local school were to close, 'It'd be all over. You see it all around in these little towns. First the school goes, then the store moves out, then the town's dead. People don't build there anymore. It just grows up empty land.' In an Idaho logging community, the school board chairman observes, 'This town is built around that school and all that goes on there. It's our entertainment for the winter; it's everything.'"

Likewise, being close to the community provides continuity for their children, parents argue. And it is a rich resource for learning educators agree. More than 100 rural school systems have followed the model developed at **Rabun Gap, Ga.,** and its Foxfire project to use student skills in preserving the cultural heritage of a community. Most urban schools are forced to simulate environmental experiences for their students, Paul Natchigal points out in his study of rural schools. But rural schools have living laboratories.

Yet, even when the spirit of collaboration between school and community is as natural as that experienced by small schools, the demands of contemporary life can chip away at it. That's why school administrators keep working at strengthening the ties that bind.

CHAPTER

Community Relations: Keeping School and Community Together

Tapping Community Resources

The **Galloway Township Public Schools, Smithville, N.J.,** are in a rural area, but very close to the swirl of Atlantic City. There were varied resources within the community that could provide management expertise for the schools, Superintendent Philip Geiger decided. The mayor of the community and Geiger wrote letters to various businesses in the area, including hotels, restaurants, casino/hotel establishments and land development companies, asking for linkages that would enhance the education program of the schools. It was hoped, says Geiger, this effort would provide the district with free professional advice and expertise; financial contributions that might initiate programs, improve the plant or contribute in other ways; and open up opportunities for dialogue between the private sector and the public schools.

The dialogue was established, he says, and the public relations aspect of the project was worth the time alone. But there have been significant financial gains, as well. These include carpeting for one entire school, consulting services of qualified engineers on water displacement problems, field trips paid for by an engineering company, professional presentations on construction projects to students, and career education presentations by professionals. Other businesses are considering the financing of conferences and seminars for school employees, according to Geiger.

Communicating With Print

Many small communities do not have a local newspaper, Superintendent Milton Anderson of **Plummer, Minn.,** points out, and it is difficult for small schools to get information printed in the newspapers of larger towns nearby (which many residents don't subscribe to, anyway). Anderson began a monthly newsletter, which includes a letter from the superintendent about school board actions; a principal's letter mostly about student activities; and contributions from several teachers, different ones each month, about the activities of their respective classrooms. Also included are a copy of the next month's calendar of events and the school lunch menus. As with others who use newsletters for communication, the publications are sent to all households in the community, not just to parents By using a postal permit ($40 a year), the complete mailing in Plummer is only about $10 a month.

The newsletter sent out by Superintendent Guy Denniston of the **Smethport Area School District, Smethport, Pa.,** includes items that will be coming up at the next board meeting, rather than an after-the-fact report. Superintendent Gordon Christianson of the **North Winneshiek Community School District, Decorah, Iowa,** uses his monthly newsletter to explain the school budget and other school needs. Quarterly and annual financial reports are included. The entire staff writes short articles each month, stressing student names in the activities they describe. Many former students and "friends" of the school district ask to be on the mailing list, Christianson says.

The **Claflin, Kan.,** schools send out three

newsletters a month to households in the community. One is prepared by the superintendent following the monthly school board meeting. One is prepared by the elementary school principal and his staff and is sent to all parents and anyone requesting to be on the mailing list. The third one is prepared by the secondary school principal and his staff.

Many school administrators use the local newspaper as a means of regular communication with the community. "I write a weekly newspaper column in which I talk about my view and philosophy concerning schools and children," says James Knox, superintendent of the **Louisburg Unified School District #416, Louisburg, Kan.** "I write not only about the good or the positive things that we are doing, but also about our failures and shortcomings. This column often creates quite a stir around the community because our people have come to realize that our district is honest and open in dealing with people." A "no holds barred" attitude is also used by Superintendent Ted Knudsen of the **Pawnee Schools, Pawnee, Ill.,** in his weekly article for the local newspaper.

Involving The Community In Budgets and Bonds

The **Cuba Central Schools, Cuba, N.Y.,** very much needed to renovate the 40-year-old high school and 25-year-old elementary school. The public approved a $2.2 million renovation proposal, and Superintendent Gene Spanneut attributes part of the acceptance to a campaign to get citizens inside the buildings through special invitations to tour. The staff conducted nine tours, involving 350 citizens, who concluded the tours where renovations were necessary. The PTA got behind the bond proposal, and a special newsletter outlining the needs was sent to all residents.

When the **Trimble County Schools, Bedford, Ky.,** needed a new high school building, Superintendent Bill Stout involved parents before plans were even drawn up by an architect. The parents formed sub-groups to inform the community of the need for a new school, and with the effort of the total community, the bond issue passed.

The **Custer Public Schools, Custer, Mont.,** faced a severe budget cut for the high school because of declining enrollment and inflation. In order to keep programs as they were in the 117-student school system, the school mill levy needed to be increased by about 70%. Superintendent Keith Schauf discussed the problems in his newsletter to the community and met with local organizations, especially senior citizens. "We explained the basic idea of school finance," he says. "We broke down the budget to show people how much revenue was received from the state and how much was supported by local taxes. We also showed the cost of the education programs. We suggested various options." In the end, the school board decided to go for the mill levy. It passed with over 80% of the vote.

"I believe this worked because we were very candid with the public, and involved them in the decision," says Schauf. "We did not insult their intelligence by trying to explain school financing in a superficial manner." One of the older residents of the community commented: "This is the first time a real effort was made to explain where the schools' money comes from, and for the first time many of us think we know what is going on."

Advisors Become Advocates

Despite tax increases, the budgets for the **Margaretville Central Schools, Margaretville, N.Y.,** have passed with wide margins for the last two years. Superintendent Dennis McLean credits a budget advisory committee for the community support. Each year community organizations such as firemen, the Chamber of Commerce and the Grange, are asked to supply one member to the advisory committee, which also includes the superintendent and a school board member. The community members are then able to explain to their groups about the budget proposals and the justifications for them.

The **Adelanto, Calif., Schools** have a year-round budget committee. Superintendent Theodore Vick explains that the committee includes representatives of the classified and certificated staff from each school, the school board, parent/community representatives from each of

the five schools, and the administrative assistant from the central office, who serves as chairperson. Requests for capital outlays, maintenance and other expenditures are presented to the committee for consideration, and its recommendations go to the school board. The committee is advisory only, Vick emphasizes, "but with this involvement there is the opportunity for widespread understandir g of the financial condition of the district."

Two quick ideas. Superintendent Gerald Daugherty of the **Seiling Schools, Seiling, Okla.,** says his district approved a $900,000 bond issue after the district conducted a citizen-led needs assessment. And the **Ellsworth Community School, Ellsworth, Mich.,** has experienced success in millage campaigns, says Superintendent Charles Pelham, by involving citizen groups as poll-watchers. They notify callers to telephone known positive voters who haven't shown up yet at the polls. The schools also place an advertisement listing the names of supporters for the millage campaign in the local newspaper.

The Community Inside The School

The **Maryville, Mo.,** schools have a variety of ways to involve citizens in "meaningful" tasks for the schools. These include a committee to make needs assessments, one that evaluates the total school program, monthly cultural film presentations in the school, and enlisting community resource people to serve on special committees (e.g. designing window insulation, painting, booster club, work on equipment, presenting bond issues to the community and writers for the school newspapers). All of these activities have produced excellent community support, says Superintendent Roland Tullberg.

A Community Resource and Interest Bank has been put on index cards in the libraries of the schools in **Schoharie, N.Y.** Teachers can use the files for resource people to be used in classrooms. Other means of community involvement, says Superintendent Charlotte Gregory, include volunteer programs, school-community meetings, a citizen's advisory committee, money-raising ventures and activities that involve the community.

The **Big Timber Grade School, Big Timber, Mont.,** also encourages community residents to share their talents. Visits have varied from a one-period presentation to a nine-week introduction to a foreign language, according to John Boe, acting principal.

The **Oxford Academy and Central School, Oxford, N.Y.,** has used citizens on special project committees. Twelve citizens helped on a study of energy conservation measures, and then were used as a speakers' bureau to convince taxpayers to fund an energy project, says Superintendent David Burroughs.

Parents serve as listeners in speech classes in the **Jefferson School District, Tracy, Calif.,** according to Superintendent Thomas Hawkins. They fill out cards on student speakers, "always beginning with praise and then presenting suggestions for improvement."

Involving senior citizens has been a special focus on many schools. The **Continental District #39, Amado, Ariz.,** is in a community of 12,000 retired people, explains Superintendent Jerry McEuen. By talking to different organizations, churches and individuals he has collected a list of more than 100 people willing to volunteer their time and share their expertise with students. This is good public relations, he points out, because the retired community pays the major share of school taxes.

The **Augusta, Wisc.,** school district took an unused portion of its high school building to develop a community center for senior citizens. It also includes a meeting center, a gymnasium for community use and a small park, says District Administrator Clifford Hudson. "The school will pay for the operating costs, giving the senior citizens a share of services for their tax dollar," he says.

Setting Goals With the Community

An annual district goal-setting meeting at the beginning of each school year has become a regular and well-attended event in the **Cashmere School District #222, Cashmere, Wash.,** according to Superintendent Richard Johnson.

The community is invited to a no-host dinner by board members, administrators and teachers;

newsletters announcing the meeting are sent to every household in the district, and it also is announced in local newspapers. Citizens let the district know they are coming, and on arrival at the dinner, each person is greeted at the door, given a name tag and seated at tables that include a student, teacher, board member or administrator and five community members. All participants are asked to fill out cards that tell three things they especially like about the schools and three things they would like to see changed (a summary of these is sent to each person later). The rest of the evening, says Johnson, is spent with each group listing its goal preferences for the year; the goals from each table are then written on a large sheet and posted on the wall. Participants give the goals priorities. Those receiving the most votes are later reviewed by school district personnel and given ranking by the school board. The results are printed in the local newspaper and sent to each household. They also become part of the evaluation of the superintendent and each employee.

"This process allows the parents and students, as well as district personnel, to have an important voice in their education progam," Johnson points out. "Communication among all groups improves, as does the commitment to excellence on the part of the staff."

Because of a rapid influx of new people into the **Park City School District, Park City, Utah,** the need for more channels for parent involvement became quickly evident. The school board established the Park City School Community Council, a group of 33 persons representing the schools, PTA, various businesses, and economic, political, social and geographical areas of the school district. The council meets monthly, says Superintendent Richard Goodworth, to discuss particular problems or work on assignments presented by the school board. For example, it was enlisted to help on studying changes in the district boundary lines and to encourage passage of a bond issue. Both things were accomplished with an 88% positive vote.

The Educational Council of the **Ada Exempted Village Schools, Ada, Ohio,** consists of two persons from each voting precinct in the school district, as well as representatives from the student council, teachers' association and employees' association. The council meets with Superintendent Neil Allen every other month to discuss various aspects of the school district. "It's excellent for two-way communication," he says.

Turning the Table

A group of people which had been vocal at board meetings was turned into a citizens advisory committee in the **Mayer United School District #43, Mayer, Ariz.,** says Superintendent James Rhodes. The committee meets the last Tuesday of each month, a week before the regular board meeting. It goes over the board agenda and prepares its comments. "This has shortened our regular board meetings by a couple of hours," says Rhodes, "and has made it easier for the board to get on the formal business at hand and keep good control of the meeting."

Community discussion groups are not a fade-in-and-out phenomenon at the **Colts Neck Township Schools, Colts Neck, N.J.** Started as an experiment in 1971, a home/school discussion group consists of nine lay persons, six selected by the PTA and three selected by building principals; a board member, three classroom teachers, one from each school; the three principals and the superintendent. The purpose of the group, which meets once a month during the school year, is to "simply conduct open discussions about the schools," says Superintendent R.J. Unger. The group is still going strong, only now it is known as the "Rap Group." Occasionally, says Unger, "we have some hot discussions, but we believe these make for better, rather than poorer, public relations. For certain, we get some good insight as to how well or how poorly people think we are doing our job. And we have learned what to do differently, many times, before we had a crisis."

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT . . . ?

* Taking information to the people where they are? The **Tonlon-Lafayette schools, Tonlon, Ill.,** printed up brochures on the school district and distributed them to businesses, banks and post offices. School officials talked local restaurants and coffee shops into putting the information on their placemats. The local bank paid for the printing, but Superintendent Charles Zbrozek suggests that area vocational centers with graphics classes could do the same. As a result, the parent-teacher organization, which had faded out 10 years ago, has been revived and citizens have offered to help in the schools, he says.

* Giving senior citizens a special pass to schools? The **Essex North Supervisory Union, Canaan, Vt.,** issues a Golden Age Pass to any retired citizen 62 years or older that allows them to attend any school-sponsored events. This has been very helpful in maintaining contact with non-parents, says W. Scott Blanchard, superintendent.

* Opening up mini-courses to adults? In the 160-student **Trumbull Consolidated schools, Trumbull, Neb.,** a week of mini-courses, usually offered between semesters in mid-January, are open to all adults in the school district. They take courses with the students, and adults are also used to teach some of the courses. They tend to center on crafts and practical things, says Superintendent Frank Shaughnessy, such as microwave cooking, furniture refinishing and beginning golf. The only fees charged are for costs of materials, and the school cafeteria is open to the adult students, if they wish.

* Getting parents involved in a code of ethics for volunteers? Grace Wittstrom, principal of the **Phillips Elementary School in Paso Robles, Calif.,** (28-student enrollment), encouraged parents at one of the early meetings in the year to discuss a code of ethics for volunteers in the school. The discussion covered privacy of children, rights and individual differences. "This has quite effectively stopped community gossip about children by parents who serve as volunteers," she reports.

* Involving parents in discipline discussions? The **Bret Harte Union High School District, Angels Camp, Calif.,** has a district discipline committee that includes parents, students and teaching staff. It is a liaison to the school board, says Superintendent Robert Bach, and although it does not make policy, it listens and makes recommendations. "Best of all," Bach says, "it is a positive channel of communication to the community."

* Taking time to show interest? Superintendent Neal Singles of **Morenci, Minn., area schools,** writes many brief letters every year to congratulate students and citizens in the district for their achievements, both in and out of school activities. Superintendent Richard Sawyer of **Milo, Maine,** thinks it is important for him to show up at the corner coffee shop to talk to people about the schools, in their terms. This eliminates the "stuffed shirt," image, he says. "I'd bet a Maine lobster that the whole country lacks the face-to-face chance for coffee talk with superintendents," he says.

* Getting citizens to adopt a tree? In the **Middlebury Community Schools, Middlebury, Ind.,** local citizens are invited to adopt, care for and harvest one or more apple trees located on school property. Superintendent Thomas Terry explains that the high school site was once an 80-acre farm and orchard tract, and a portion of the orchard was preserved. "We find that we have a waiting list of amateur orchardmen who wish to care for and harvest a few trees as a hobby," he says. "We have an annual workshop in the orchard to help the hobbyists learn how to prune, spray and care for their trees." He suggests the same sort of goodwill could be achieved by allowing a plot of a school site to be divided into small family gardens each summer.

* Taking to neighborhoods? William Bassett, superintendent at **Chadwicks Union Free School, Chadwicks, N.Y.,** has asked key residents to organize meetings for neighbors in their homes. School personnel make brief presentations, then open the evening up to answer any questions that come up.

Reprinted with permission from: School-Community Relations in Small School Districts: Developing a Plan for a Productive Partnership, Steve Toy, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1987, pp 46-47; 81-96.

NOTABLE PRACTICES

Many school districts throughout the country are employing notable school-community relations practices that provide excellent models for districts just beginning to formulate their programs. Often, these districts serve small, rural communities.

Twenty-Six Helps

A study of such districts throughout the country resulted in the following list of 26 such notable practices:

1 -- Newsletters

2 -- Policies, job descriptions and goals

3 -- Detailed administrative regulations on community relations

4 -- Priorities and priority indicators

5 -- Annual accountability report

6 -- A diversity of techniques

7 -- Two-way communications procedures

8 -- In-service training in school-community relations

9 -- Learning at Home project

10 -- Key communicator network

11 -- Weekly newsletters to board members

12 -- Attempts to define and reach various publics

13 -- Monthly citizen luncheons

14 -- Use of business marketing skills in the school

15 -- "Someone special" days

16 -- Public relations activity planning sheets

17 -- Career guidance project

18 -- Flexible parent conference scheduling

19 -- Apprenticeship program

20 -- Community discussion groups

21 -- Staff involvement in news distribution

22 -- Community-involving budget procedures

23 -- Meetings between school board and other governing boards

24 -- Educational councils involving community members

25 -- Adopt-a-school program

26 -- Short- and long-term planning procedures

These notable practices will be considered now as they are put into use throughout the country.

Ashdown, Arkansas

The Ashdown Public Schools consider their newsletter to be the heart of their public relations effort. The newsletter includes news about each of the five schools.

Ashdown also conducts regular needs assessment meetings.

The community relations effort in Ashdown is handled by the principal of two elementary schools. The district's motto is "Between Us--School and community working together toward greater excellence in education."

Texarkana, Arkansas

Texarkana School District No. 7 maintains extensive Board of Education policies on community relations. While there is no written plan for community relations, the policies can serve as such. They include a detailed job description for the information services/personnel coordinator who sets annual objectives and goals.

The district policies reflect an attitude that the community has a right to know about the schools. Activities in the Texarkana program include monthly newsletters to parents in each school; a faculty/staff newsletter published four

times a year; a 5-minute, twice-a-week radio program; a cable television program, six times a week; a 24-hour information number; a weekly written report to the board of education; a written report to all faculty and staff concerning board actions; community advisory committees; surveys; and recognition of faculty and staff members on their birthdays.

Adelanto, California

The Adelanto School District, Adelanto, California, has a school-community relations program that includes administrative regulations as well as board policies. The policies are broad and cover such areas as public participation, communications with the public, relations between schools and community, community recreation programs, disasters, and visitations and political activities.

Its public relations objectives include:

--explaining the programs, achievements and needs of the schools to parents and the community

--making every effort to foresee and avoid problems caused by misunderstanding or lack of information

--providing optimum staff performance by keeping all staff members fully informed

--operating in public session as speedily and efficiently as circumstances permit, with public participation

In another district, I had concern expressed by the board that the board meetings frequently took on a negative tone. In effect, I was being told that the board was hearing all the bad news, and little of the good. We developed an idea I have since instituted in other districts in which I have worked; "Spotlight" items were placed on the board agenda. These items are designed to be informational reports, presented by teachers or students, on some aspect of our school's programs. They are designed to be enthusiastic, positive reports on what is going on in our schools.

To kick off the school year each year, I visit each classroom personally on the first day of school and present each teacher and staff member a boutonniere or corsage to welcome them back to school.

And on the day before Christmas vacation, the superintendent dresses up like Santa Claus--his secretary is Santa's helper--and delivers the district's Christmas present (last year it was hams) to employees at their work site.

How do you get started? Can all these practices be put together in a school-community relations plan for your district?

A model plan is presented in the next section.

A MODEL PLAN

Here is a model plan you can use to help initiate many of the ideas that have been discussed in this book.

Development of Policies and Regulations

A school-community relations plan for a small, rural school district should start with board policy demonstrating the district's commitment to such a plan, to justify the time and any expense that might be involved (Di Benedetto & Wilson, 1982; Cannedy, 1982).

A sample policy, prepared by the Educational Policies Service of the National School Boards Association, includes the following:

--The board believes that an effective communications program is a necessary component of a school system's organization and operation. Therefore, the board supports the means necessary for its organization, maintenance, and operation

--A school system's communications program should: encourage a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the school system; be a planned, systematic, two-way process between the board and the superintendent

and their internal and external constituencies; use a variety of media including meetings, letters, circulars, seminars, publications and personal contacts; provide the channels necessary for resolving grievances and eliminating misunderstandings; and inform concerned persons as to their rights, privileges and responsibilities

--A school's communications program should: encourage informal, as well as formal, methods of communication; use a variety of media including meetings, seminars, bulletin boards, publications and personal contacts; provide channels for resolving grievances and/or misunderstandings for students, staff and community members; inform concerned persons as to their rights, privileges and responsibilities; and supplement and support the general communications program of the school system

--The board delegates to the superintendent the development of a communications program in accordance with the above principles and suggestions

These board policies should be supplemented with specific administrative regulations delegating specific job assignments and tasks. There should be someone, such as the superintendent in a small school, delegated at the district level. If there are several buildings in the district, then someone should serve as liaison for the school-community relations effort in each building. This liaison

could be an administrator, teacher or volunteer from the community.

Research

Once board policies and administrative regulations are in place, and persons delegated to the program, research should be conducted to determine the specific goals and objectives of the program (Bradberry, 1980; Canfield, 1968). This will most likely be in the form of a community needs assessment to determine current strong and weak areas in the school's community relations. The purpose is to determine which problems need solving.

This needs assessment can be accomplished through a written survey or through a phone survey. Perhaps community group meetings or coffee klatches could be used to assess community feeling on school-community relations.

In rural areas there is often prevalent thinking that formal research and needs assessment are not necessary since everyone has frequent contact with the school. However, contact does not necessarily mean communication.

Those conducting the research should attempt to: (1) identify people who have things to say about a variety of issues; (2) select a sufficiently representative sample of these people to provide a useful impression of attitudes on various topics; (3) construct a survey that will deliver practical information for short- and long-range planning; and (4) organize a continuous program of survey feedback that can be implemented inexpensively and

effectively at both the district and individual school-building level.

One survey should not be expected to accomplish too many things. The survey is one of many effective tools for soliciting community opinions about school issues, but it can create confusion and give conflicting information if not carefully focused. A short, targeted survey is the most effective.

Correct Deficiencies First

The research on this point is very clear--most public relations specialists feel a school-community relations program cannot succeed unless it is representing a good product (Bangert, 1982; NSPRA, 1980). Therefore, any deficiencies in the product must be corrected before the school-community relations program can achieve its greatest success. The purpose of the program is not to try to sell an inferior product, but to communicate information about a good product. If the needs assessment turns up deficiencies, these should be reported to the proper authorities for appropriate goal and objective setting which should be carried out independently of the school-community relations program.

Schools must meet the educational needs of people in a fast-changing world. An excellent product is basic--it is the very foundation of the schools. What is taught and how well it is taught will have a profound effect on how people feel about the schools in the community. Staff should welcome information that helps them understand how well students are actually learning.

As a basic foundation of a school-community relations program, educators should be committed to: helping every student succeed to the limits of his or her ability; planning for each school day and the school year, and then following the plan; making sure students spend enough time on the right tasks; developing high, yet realistic expectations for students; studying developments in learning theory and applying what is learned in the classroom to assure that students are mastering needed knowledge and skills; and working toward a solution when parents, students or others express a concern or present a problem.

Set Goals and Objectives

The next step is to set goals and objectives for the program (Dahlinger, 1982; Simon, 1980). Small schools most especially need to recognize that all needs cannot be solved in any given year. There must be a prioritizing of goals and objectives so that the ultimate program can be managed by a small staff and community.

Goals and objectives should be divided into two major groupings: internal, aimed at those that work within the school system; and external, aimed at those that are in the community but not within the school system. Within each of those areas, the goals and objectives should address short-term as well as long-range projects.

The goals need not be lengthy or elaborate. There may be many specific tasks, but the goal statements might very well be as concise as the following four statements:

--Obtain comprehensive, accurate and fair coverage of school activities

--Provide employees with timely and accurate information

--Provide citizens with accurate and timely information

--Assist the general superintendent and board of education in their efforts to communicate with employees and other citizens

Honesty

Research has shown honesty to be a priority in school-community relations programs (Marx, 1982; Spillman, 1982). There is no place in the school-community relations program for non-truths, for selective information-giving, or for leaving controversial issues out of the school's information program. Such practices reduce the credibility of the program and undermine its success.

Internal Relationships

Considerable effort in school-community relations in a rural community can be wasted because one or two staff members are saying derogatory things about the school. Since those that work in the schools are considered the most reliable source of information about their schools, it behooves the school-community relations program to constantly address internal communications (Holloran, 1982; NSPRA, 1980).

The internal communications system should have built into it opportunity for two-way communications with such internal publics as school board members; administrators and supervisors; counselors; librarians and library aides; teachers, substitute teachers and interns; school psychologists; nurses; secretaries and clerical aides; custodians; cafeteria personnel and bus drivers.

Internal relationships become quite critical in a small, rural school district, since employees have daily contact with the community at the grocery store or at the football game. Staff members should be able to take pride in their school, but they cannot do so if they do not have full information about the school.

Staff members should never be placed in the position of learning from someone else what is going on in their school. One excellent communications technique is to let staff members know immediately what took place in a board meeting by distributing a special newsletter or holding a special faculty and staff meeting. This is a good way to squelch rumors that follow board meetings and it prepares staff members for encounters in the grocery store.

Other successful internal communications techniques include daily building bulletins, regular rap sessions, comprehensive teacher handbooks, frequent (in some cases, weekly) faculty meetings, and a friendly, supportive administrative attitude.

Staff involvement in news distribution is another successful technique derived from the

study of school-community relations programs. Staff members can feel a sense of ownership in the school district when they are sought out for news and can have an opportunity to see their own programs publicized.

Weekly newsletters to board members are another successful internal technique. This technique keeps board members informed, and again helps counteract rumors.

"Someone special" days can be successful, such as "teacher appreciation day," "bus driver appreciation day," etc.

Other internal communications strategies include involving employees in setting goals, reviewing and revising employment practices, providing opportunities to hear staff concerns, and planning for crisis through use of key staff communicators to dispel rumors.

External Relationships

Once internal relationships are secure, effort can be given to those external relationships with parents, non-parent taxpayers, media and others that shape the ultimate effectiveness of the school. Again, built-in opportunity for two-way communications is essential (Campbell, 1954).

Research shows that notable practices of small, rural schools in building external relationships include newsletters, annual accountability reports, learning at home projects, key communicator networks, monthly citizen lunches, career guidance projects, flexible parent conference scheduling,

apprenticeship programs, community discussion groups, budget procedures which involve the community, meetings between school board and other governing boards, educational councils involving community members, and adopt-a-school programs.

Other effective external communications practices include regular news releases, distribution of student handbooks to all community members, positive notes home, positive home visits by teachers and administrators, visibility of administrators, well-organized board meetings, use of community resources, community education programs, senior citizens programs, community work days, and community involvement in curriculum development and change (Lowrey, 1982).

A special attempt should be made to involve all of the district's publics including the business community, real estate persons, religious institutions, senior citizens, community organizations, government agencies, other educational institutions, and youth groups.

Special campaigns may be desired for specific issues, such as elections (millage, special levy or bond referendums, tax increases), wars on vandalism or drug abuse, promotion of special programs, recruitment of students, staff and parents, or public awareness of school strengths.

Media Relationships

In a small, rural school district, the maintenance of media relationships--whether with

the local weekly paper or a nearby television station--is critical (Canfield, 1968; Dodds, 1982). Because it is usually quite easy to have school material published in a small, rural paper, the school should embark on a program of regular news dissemination to the newspaper. The person responsible for the school-community relations program should become familiar with the news deadlines for the local papers, and make sure releases meet those deadlines. The media in small school districts are generally "pro-school." Well-written news releases will often be printed verbatim.

Districts should be aware of all the newspapers their community members read. Newspaper coverage areas often overlap. News should be provided to all these areas. Superintendents should get to know the local publishers well. Occasional hand-delivered news releases can help build a relationship.

News releases do not have to concern themselves with just "news." Information on routine occurrences may be welcome, if they deal with such matters as enrollment trends, transportation programs, student health programs, music and art education, science, ways parents can help their child learn, special education programs, pre-school programs, grade reporting, vocational programs, reading programs, student honors and achievements, testing programs, community use of schools, finance information dealing with local/state/federal monies, rising energy costs, or sports and drama.

The stories should be well-written, and follow standard news story formats. It is

suggested that those writing the releases obtain a journalism text as a guide.

Small papers welcome sharp black and white photos.

Personal Good Will and Enthusiasm

One interesting aspect of research performed in the area of school-community relations programs is that it isolated two intangibles as important standards for a small, rural school district public relations program--personal good will and enthusiasm. Perhaps this is because what each person does in a small community, and how the person feels, indelibly affects how well the school runs and how the community feels about the school (Knox, 1983; NSPRA, 1980).

The administrator in charge of the school-community relations program must therefore encourage personal good will on the part of all of the employees. Training should be provided--even in a small district--in the proper manner of greeting visitors personally, and in telephone etiquette. Employee needs should be met so that they can feel good about the school, and emanate that feeling.

Enthusiasm is contagious. It must begin at the top--with the superintendent--and be allowed to spread. Excitement about the school, and about the work to be performed, should be freely shared by all involved in the work.

Evaluation

The final stage in the small, rural school-community relations effort should be evaluation to determine the success of the program, and to assist in planning for future school-community relations efforts (Banach, 1982; Cutlip & Center, 1964).

Resources may be limited for evaluation efforts. Some districts may therefore choose to evaluate informally. Passage of tax levies gives feedback, as do thank you cards or positive phone calls. Friendly comments to staff members by community members in stores and on the street can give feedback.

Verbal feedback at parent conferences can be an important source of evaluative information. If time and resources permit, more formal evaluative techniques may be desired. Surveys addressing specific aspects of the community relations program might be appropriate. Community coffees to assess the program might be effective. Logs of phone calls or visits to the school, and the nature of the discussion, could give an administrator a determination of community attitudes.

Evaluation is a critical aspect of the school-community relations program of a small, rural school district.

A Plan Outline

The following could serve as a short outline for a small, rural school district school-community relations plan:

1 -- Develop board policies and regulations.

2 -- Do research to determine specific goals and objectives. Do needs assessment to determine what problems need solving.

3 -- Correct existing deficiencies.

4 -- Set goals and objectives.
  (a) Internal goals and objectives.
  (b) External goals and objectives.

5 -- Give honesty priority.

6 -- Give personal good will and enthusiasm a priority.

7 -- Plan the actual program, including:
  (a) Daily, ongoing activities.
  (b) Special planned projects, events and activities.
  (c) The various audiences at which the program will be aimed.
  (d) The timeline for handling the above.

8 -- Plan the methods of communications that will be used--print media, other media, advertising, etc.

9 -- Execute the program.

10 -- Measure and evaluate the success of the program.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this book has been to develop a model plan for school-community relations for small, rural school districts. The proposed plan has been scaled to the level of small, rural school districts. It is recommended that districts in this category consider their school-community relations needs and review the model plan for possible assistance.

The model plan has been based on 10 standards that should be a part of a school-community relations plan for small, rural school districts: an evaluation component; someone delegated with specific responsibility for the program; a good product; a program that's planned and systematic, including goals and objectives; research; personal good will; honesty; sound media relationships; two-way communications; and enthusiasm.

School districts using the model plan may also be able to incorporate the 26 school-community relations helps listed herein, including newsletters; policies, job descriptions and goals; detailed administrative regulations on community relations; priorities and priority indicators; annual accountability reports; a diversity of techniques; two-way communications procedures; in-service training in school-community relations; Learning at Home project; key communicator network; weekly newsletters

to board members; attempts to define and reach various publics; and monthly citizen luncheons.

Other school-community relations strategies include use of business marketing skills in the school; "someone special" days; public relations activity planning sheets; career guidance projects; flexible parent conference scheduling; apprenticeship programs; community discussion groups; staff involvement in news distribution; community-involving budget procedures; meetings between school board and other governing boards; educational councils involving community members; adopt-a-school programs; and short- and long-term planning procedures.

The 10 standards, and sample ideas, can be used in the model plan that calls for developing policies and regulations, research, correcting of deficiencies first, setting goals and objectives, honesty, developing positive internal and external relationships, maintaining media relationships, emphasizing personal good will and enthusiasm, and evaluation.

Even though small, rural districts are limited in time, personnel, and financial resources, such school districts can--and need to--provide full-scale school-community relations efforts. Community relations should remain a high priority in small school districts.

Small, rural school districts using this model plan are advised that its success comes, not through a widely heralded implementation of a new program that is announced as such, but through the carefully planned implementation of

these ideas into the day-to-day operation of the district.

A sound school-community relations program becomes more than a frill when one considers the amount of time it takes to calm down parents who can't understand why their child has to be on the bus 75 minutes, or to fight off a group of 50 angry citizens filibustering the school board meeting.

A scound school-community relations program is a necessity and an investment in the educational security of your community.

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